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# ACTION

## F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

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# IN ACTION

STUDIES IN WAR

BY

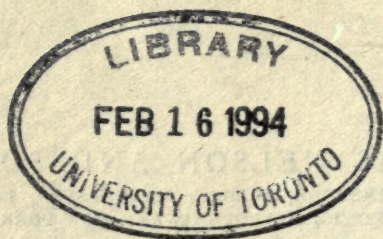
F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS

LONDON, EDINBURGH, DUBLIN, MANCHESTER, LEEDS

PARIS, LEIPZIG, MELBOURNE, AND NEW YORK

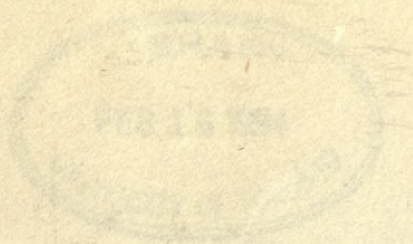
*First Published in 1913.*





*Some of these sketches have already appeared in the pages of "THE SPHERE" and the "GRAND MAGAZINE," to the editors of which publications I hereby tender my acknowledgments.*

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TO MY FRIEND  
H. D. C.

TO MY FRIEND  
H. D. C.



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## IN ACTION.

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### IN ACTION.

THE regiment had been lying in position for some hours since the early dawn, waiting. It had not been allowed to construct proper shelter-trenches, for an attack was expected every second, and the regiment was raw ; its colonel feared to trust it out of formation at a critical time. Each man had scraped a little earth *épaulement* in front of him, behind which he lay full length. The officers squatted on the ground

behind their men ; only the tall figure of the colonel was silhouetted against the sky as he anxiously scanned the horizon. The position of the regiment was an extended line a few yards below the crest of a long ridge, which sloped towards the expected attack. Some distance to the left it curved forward and then bent sharply back, forming a salient angle. The ground had been roughly levelled along the line so as to form a sort of platform for the men's recumbent bodies. Behind it, at the other side of the ridge, the supports were stationed, and the ambulance. Farther back still, near a little village in the valley, was a howitzer battery. At each end of its line the regiment joined hands

with others in like formation. From far away came the persistent roar of artillery. No enemy was visible.

Private 99203 lay behind his little breastwork nervously fingering his rifle. The long hours of inaction and suspense had told upon his nerves as on those of every man in the line. Above all, the constant thunder of the hidden guns, swelling momentarily till the very air seemed to shake with their reverberation, filled him with vague uneasiness and a curious physical discomfort. His body somehow seemed to have lost solidity, his stomach trembled, something crept along his spine. The day was already hot, but his hands were cold. Anxiously he gazed in the direction of the terrible sound.



There was nothing to be seen, not even a dimness on the clear blue summer sky. Then for the hundredth time his eyes ranged the ground which somewhere concealed the enemy. In front of him and below him the grass land stretched uninterrupted by hedge or ditch, save where about eight hundred yards distant a stream wound a course roughly parallel to the position, until a mile and a half away it reached the dark mass of woodland which swept over the crest of the next ridge and down to its foot. A road emerged from the wood, crossed the level ground, and curved to the left of the position. The whole plain was bare of any living thing.

He turned his head and looked

along his own line. At first the men had laughed and chatted gaily enough, if somewhat nervously ; but now the long tension had hushed their voices, and most of them searched the distances with haggard eyes in silence. A couple of subalterns behind him conversed in subdued tones, almost inaudible in the roar of the unseen, firmament-shaking guns. Some way along the line a heliograph was flashing out hurried messages into space. High up in the sky a balloon was floating. He was ignorant whether theirs or the enemy's.

The muffled beat of hoofs upon the turf startled him. The general commanding the division galloped up with his staff, spoke a few words to the colonel, and disappeared. The

whole line waited expectantly for an order. None came. The artillery thunder seemed to increase.

Suddenly, with six regular crashes at intervals as precise as those of a striking clock, the howitzer battery behind him fired. He looked eagerly to discover their target, but could not even see where the shells burst. The battery continued to fire methodically over the ridge into seeming nothingness, until its monotony rendered him almost oblivious to it.

After some time he heard a peculiarly shrill sound—something like the screech of a steam whistle. It started on a low note, rose swiftly to a piercing intensity, and finished in a sharp crash behind him. Then the shrill sound came again, and



suddenly a white cloud-puff appeared in the air in front of him, and there was a crash and a strange humming.

“Shrapnel,” said the man next to him through locked teeth. Now the smoke-puffs and crashes followed one another quickly all along the line, but principally, it seemed to him, near the salient angle occupied by the next regiment. So far no one near him was hurt. He waited in mental anguish for something to happen. Suddenly a man sprang up with a shriek, rushed along the line for a few yards, and fell. A couple of ambulance men ran up to him, turned him over, and left him. Private 99203 felt his nerves go all to pieces. A wild desire to spring up and rush away beset him. There

was an uneasy stir all along the line.

“ Lie down ! lie down ! ” shouted the officers, and the colonel strode among the bullets to hearten the men, cursing at the raw troops he had to command.

The shrapnel fire persisted, sweeping the salient angle for the most part, but searching all along the line at intervals, striking a man here and there. The ambulance men were in evidence all the time—here carrying a man off slung over their backs or on a stretcher, there examining one and leaving him. Sometimes they, too, stumbled and fell—not to rise again. The regiment set its teeth and lay still. Behind it the howitzer battery crashed out

monotonously against the invisible enemy.

The strain was becoming intolerable. Here and there along the line men were taken ill and retired, bolting back like rabbits, ducking their heads in ludicrous fashion to escape the invisible bullets. Some swore softly, continually, some prayed, some babbled they knew not what. Above all the din rose the voices of officers exhorting their men to be steady. On the ridge the heliograph still flashed, but the figure of the colonel was no longer seen against the sky. He was stretched on the ground anxiously watching the wood a mile and a half away through his glasses.

Presently he saw a dark figure emerge from it, and then another,



and then several, and then many. The sharp-sighted among the men saw them also. The cry, "There they are!" ran along the line. Private 99203 instinctively laid his finger on the trigger of his rifle. Here and there a shot was fired, but the officers intervened angrily. The shrapnel hail beat on the line in savage bursts, but in their interest in their now visible foe the men were unmindful of it and its effects.

The enemy were forming in dark lines at the edge of the wood beyond effective rifle range. A mass of them appeared for a moment on the road, where it issued on to the plain. "Where are the guns?" the men asked one another in impotent anger. Even as they spoke another series

of crashes was added to the din, and white puffs commenced to burst over and on the road and along the dark lines. Then the enemy advanced in rushes. The lines opened out at wide intervals, so that individual figures could be clearly seen; they pressed on towards the ridge. A crackling of rifle-fire arose faint in the din of crashing guns and bursting shells. Bits of turf were flicked up mysteriously like rain splashes in a puddle.

A humming as of innumerable insects passed over the heads of the regiment. A man raised himself to get a better view of the enemy. "Lie down!" shouted the officers, themselves lying prone. He fell huddled, the blood running from his

mouth. Every man in the line was aching to fire, but the officers restrained them almost with entreaties. It was intolerable to lie there and not reply to this hail of death. At last the order ran along the line, "Fifteen hundred yards!" The rifles seemed to go off themselves with a simultaneous report. Once started there was no stopping the men. They fired until their magazines were empty. Each shot was a relief to their overstressed nerves.

Gradually the fire slackened, and grew steadier. Each man tried to take definite aim. Private 99203 stopped for a minute or two to let his rifle cool. His head buzzed and was very hot. He felt atrociously hungry and thirsty; his lips were



cracked and his mouth was dry with shouting, although he did not know that he had uttered a sound. Gazing through the smoke mist at the enemy, he was amazed at the small effect of the fire of the defence. Bodies dotted the plain, but great numbers of the dark figures were still running forward. Some had even reached the stream eight hundred yards away, and were firing from the shelter of its banks. Shells were bursting among them, and above the rifle-fire of his regiment a Maxim was rattling viciously. Still the enemy advanced.

He looked at his comrade on the right. The man no longer fired; his head had fallen on to the stock of his rifle. Private 99203 felt sud-

denly lonely. It seemed to him that he was utterly alone, severed from all companionship, encompassed by threatening death.

“Fix bayonets!” He scarcely heard the order, but obeyed it automatically. The fire of the regiment ceased for a second, and then the bullets leaped out again from a glittering line of steel. The enemy were getting very close. The shrapnel hail had ceased, he knew not when.

He took careful aim at one of the running figures, and saw it fall. A savage exultation filled him. He fired again and again into the oncoming crowd of rushing men. The foremost were already half-way up the slope. He heard a volley above his head. The supports were firing

from the top of the ridge. Somehow through the din he caught the encouraging voices of the officers. He forgot himself, forgot his own danger, forgot everything but the necessity of firing steadily into the swiftly advancing figures.

The crowd dwindled, seemed to melt. Each group was swept away by the tempest of lead. Isolated figures turned and ran down the slope. Others followed. Some few struggled on to be shot down. The remainder raced back to the shelter of the stream banks, where, meeting their advancing comrades, they heaped themselves confusedly. It was the regiment's chance. Desperately, as fast as they could aim and pull trigger, the men poured bullets into

the mass. It broke and ran in dire confusion back across the plain, chased by the bursting smoke-puffs and dropping dark figures at every moment.

The attack had failed !

At that moment, above the noise of battle, the regiment heard a mighty rushing sound. It came nearer, swelling every second, until it revealed itself in a tremendous, soul-stirring outburst of cheering. Swiftly the sound approached. It ran along their line also. The men sprang to their feet, waving their helmets in the air, and cheering as they had never cheered before. Somehow they knew that they had won a battle.

The guns still thundered on the retiring enemy.



## THE TRAP.

THE sun had just set, and the mists were beginning to collect in the hollows of the hilly, wooded country. All day long the tree-clad slopes had re-echoed the roar of artillery and the clatter of rifle-fire. With the fading light the battle had died away, and after the hours of deafening uproar the world seemed strangely quiet, although the bugle calls of the troops, the passing of batteries and munition trains, the cries of wounded men, the gallop of stampeded, riderless horses, the

shouts of exulting regiments, made more than enough of distracting, complex noise ; and the rumble of a distant cannonade, whipping on the flying foe, sounded still the dread key-note of the day.

On the crest of one of the many hills stood four long guns, their muzzles pointing up into the air in an attitude of silent expectation. Their crews stood by them, stiffly, without a word, in their allotted positions. Behind them the captain of the battery was bent in close examination of a map. After careful observation with compass and quadrant and a mass of calculations on paper, he strode up to each gun in succession. The tangent scales were set ; the elevation adjusted.

Then, standing at one end of the battery, the captain gave the order : " Number one, fire ! " There was a flash of flame and a roar, and the great shell sped into the air, to fall eight miles away. Then he passed to the next gun : " Number two, fire ! " and so on to the third and fourth. From each gun a man sprang sideways to the wagon for another shell, another sponged the monster through, another laid it according to the scale ; and each gun fired successively, deliberately, into the darkening sky.

\* \* \* \*

A byroad ran for some miles through a narrow valley, passed a village, and, just beyond it, branched into two arms in the direction of the battlefield. Each of these arms

followed the valley of a small stream. Along the road and through the village an interminable line of carts and wagons had been halted since the dawn. They contained the food, ammunition, and other necessities for a division of the army. It was days since they had come in touch with the regiments to which they belonged. Driven vainly first to one rendezvous and then another, beset with contradictory orders, they had halted here, stopped by the sound of heavy firing in their front. Many of them had been conducted by civilian drivers, impressed against their will. One by one during the long hours of waiting, with the roar of a dreadful cannonade threatening them, it seemed, ever more closely, these



had slipped away, panic-stricken or merely rebellious, and disappeared. One by one the military drivers had followed their example. At last the miles-long train of vehicles stood unguarded, derelict upon the road, the horses nosing vainly against the wagon in front, or whinnying pitifully in fear.

The village also had been abandoned by its inhabitants. Its cottages were boarded up ; no smoke came from any chimney ; no figure moved along the road. The ale-house only lay open, its broken shutters, swaying on their hinges, revealing the débris of its windows. It had been raided and ransacked. The whole place stood desolate in the mellow glow of the declining sun. The roar of battle filled the

air, but only the abandoned horses were there to shrink, frightened at the sound. At the bifurcation and beyond, on each of its branches, the road was clear.

Suddenly the torpor of the place was broken. A clattering of hoofs approached swiftly along one of the converging roads. A mounted man, with blanched face and staring eyes, dashed through the village, startling the interminable line of waiting horses as he passed. Another followed him, this man swaying in his saddle and looking despairingly up to the boarded windows. His horse was foam-flecked and stumbling. He spurred it unmercifully, and rode on. The thunder of the guns seemed less distant.

Then several ambulance carts came through, at a smart trot. They swerved into the cobbled gutter, so as to pass the long line of derelict wagons. A discordant chorus of groans and shrieks and imprecations burst from them with every jolt over the rough stones. With the indifference of men hardened by long impotence to relieve, the drivers whipped on their horses, and the carts, with their load of agony, passed quickly along the road.

The village was again left in solitude. The steep hills behind the houses began to be silhouetted against the red sky. The roar of artillery abated not at all.

Presently, dragging himself painfully and slowly along the road, an

infantry soldier appeared. His uniform was rent to rags, and he was weaponless. With every step he left a trail of blood upon the ground. At the sight of the village he seemed to collect his energies for a final effort ; and with the uncertain gait of a drunken man, he forced himself up to the village pump which stood at the side of the ale-house. His mouth was wide open and gasping as he laid hold of the pump-handle and strove to push it up and down. The effort was too great. He fell prone and lifeless as the water gushed out, plashing upon his head.

A little knot of running men followed close upon his heels. They turned aside to the pump and jostled one another for the water, not trou-



bling even to kick the dead man's body out of the way. Then they ran on again.

They were but the advance guard. Twenty or thirty more rushed by the line of wagons, those who had still retained their accoutrements tearing them off and throwing them away that they might run the easier. Half a squadron of cavalry dashed after them, riding down those who had not time to get out of the way. The murmur of a multitude approached, an undertone to the thunder of artillery.

One after another—first in little dribblets, then in a stream, then in a close-packed torrent—the fugitives raced through the deserted village and passed the train of waiting

wagons. Some were mounted. Some on foot. Some dragged themselves with feeble steps. Some ran lustily, shouldering the weaker out of the way. Nearly all had thrown away their weapons. Many dashed into the ale-house, to come out again cursing, and rejoin the shouting, jostling, panic-stricken, swiftly-running torrent that now poured through the village. Still the distant artillery thundered.

It was a torrent terrible to look upon and to hear. With uniforms torn to rags, with faces red with blood or black from some narrowly escaped explosion, with curses on their lips and frenzy in their eyes, the beaten soldiery fought to pass each other and the line of wagons

that took up the greater part of the road. Amid shrieks and blows and prayers and oaths the rout continued. Mounted men forced themselves through the crowd, striking wildly with their swords, if they had retained them, trampling those who fell unmercifully underfoot. Revolver shots rang out here and there. Officer and man were indistinguishable ; rank was obliterated in this mass of struggling primeval humanity. Each, if he thought at all, thought of himself. Escape, escape at any price from those terrible guns, was the impulse which drove the frenzied crowd.

The sun set, and the surrounding hills were veiled in gray shadow, but with every moment of deepening

twilight the frantic crowd in the village grew thicker. The traces of the wagon-horses were cut, and men strove desperately to ride them through the press. The wagons themselves were plundered for food and drink by men who had resigned themselves to the impossibility of escape, and who now fought with one another for the contents. They were a tiny minority; the rout surged and seethed past them without intermission.

Suddenly there was a locomotive-like shriek in the air above, and, with a deafening report, a large shell exploded just at the junction of the converging roads. Three others followed—two on one side, a third plump into a house, which burst



into volumes of smoke and flame. Cut into two, the torrent surged back on itself for an instant confusedly, then rushed on again, heedless of the groans and shrieks of those who had been wounded, but, unfortunately for them, not killed by the explosion.

There was an outburst of wild cries, and the remnant of a battery, the horses lashed into a frenzied gallop, came tearing through the crowd. It shore its way through the mass of men as though they had been mere phantoms. The drivers' mouths were swollen with shouting as they flogged their beasts onward. The gunners clung for life to the swaying, leaping carriages and limbers, their eyes haggard and their

faces black. The battery had long since lost its officers. The first gun had barely passed the cross-roads when a shell crashed into its limber, exploding the remaining ammunition. The gun following was wrecked, and those succeeding, unable to stop, piled themselves upon it. A great clear space was made in the torrent of flying men. For a second only it remained, and then the survivors dashed forward before another shell came.

Behind the wrecked battery the road was blocked on each of its branches. The press of men was so great that the wreckage could not be cleared. Isolated men clambered over the débris, and ran forward. Behind the barrier a sickening fight

took place for a chance of surmounting it.

Again the terror-bringing shriek overhead tore the air, and again the great shells disrupted with vivid flame and paralysing sound, one, two, three, four, upon the road.

It was now night, but all the houses and many of the wagons were ablaze, and cast a lurid light over this dam of death. One by one the great shells crashed on to the village or the cross-roads. At each a louder shriek, above the pandemonium of shrieks and cries, rent the air.

An ambulance wagon, full of groaning sufferers, pressed slowly up to the barrier and stopped. Another broken battery, tearing a frantic way through

the mass, flung itself into it and overturned it.

A whole army corps was dammed up in the converging roads. The flames of the burning houses showed hundreds of dark figures clambering along the steep hillsides which contained them. The great mass was in the hollow, and could not escape from it.

Suddenly a rocket shot up into the air above the village. A clattering of horses was heard, and a few scattered rifle shots, and the hoarse cries of men at strife. No more shells dropped. Emboldened, the pent-up fugitives tried another dash over the barrier of wreckage. Facing them they saw, in the light of the burning village, the grim muzzles of



a battery, and behind it the flashing swords of a regiment of cavalry. They were cut off!

Surrender was a relief.

The word flew back along the converging masses of beaten men. The press, in some measure, ceased. The fugitives who had space to do so sat down upon the road. Some cursed. A few wept. An intolerable fatigue weighed upon all. Thousands dropped immediately into slumber, more profound than a drug would have induced. The occasional shots, picking off men who tried to escape, woke them not. The groans along those two terrible roads merged, at a little distance off, into a sigh of the relief which comes when the worst is known at last.

Thus they remained until the morning, when, disarmed, they were marched into the ranks of their foes.

## DEATH.

THE fumes of lyddite yet hung in the air as the loose khaki-clad line burst through the wire entanglements, raced up the last few yards of steep ascent, and flung itself into the abandoned trench.

“Blimy!” said one of the soldiers, as he lay flat amid a litter of brass cartridge-cases and recovered his breath with an effort. “Never thought we’d get ’ere, Bill.”

Bill, a thick-set, dirty little man, with a podgy nose and half a week’s growth of stubble on his grimed

face, made no answer. On hands and knees he was prospecting for water-bottles that might yet contain a little of the precious fluid. Those he found lay with their stoppers out. He was crawling back to an accompaniment of oaths—the meaningless, unconsecutive, violent oaths of a man whose nerves have been kept too long near breaking strain—when he perceived a pair of boots overhanging the upper edge of the chalky trench. He reached up and tugged at them, and a corpse slithered heavily down into the cartridge-strewn ditch, a tiny avalanche of dirt beneath it. As it fell, an arm flopped across and knocked off the thirsty soldier's cap. The action would have terrified a man less accustomed to handling



bodies from which the life had been summarily ejected. It caused barely the half of an oath to go down to Bill's account with the Recording Angel as he snatched at the dead man's flask, and held it to his lips.

"Save us a drop, Bill," said the other man, watching him. "My mouth's fair cracked."

Bill looked at him, and, the habit of comradeship overcoming his primitive instincts, held out the flask.

"There ain't much, Alf," he said, as the other man greedily drank at the bottle. "'Ere, steady on—give the orf'cer a drop! 'E's about done up."

A young lieutenant huddled rather than sat just behind them. He was evidently at the last stage of ex-

haustion. A sweat-channelled grime hid to some extent the livid pallor of his face, but his condition was manifest enough from the droop of his eyelids, the relaxation of the facial muscles which permitted a glimpse of his tongue through an open mouth, the nerveless lassitude of his limbs. He was a mere boy, and the long exposure to a scorching sun, the privation of food and drink, the anxiety, the nervous strain of shepherding half a hundred men through hour after hour of imminent danger, with every sense kept at a fever-pitch of acuteness, had drained him of vitality faster than he knew. Now, the trench won after a swift, maddening crescendo of excitement, the urgent necessity to "keep going"

lifted for a moment, he had fallen in collapse.

Bill saluted with one hand, and proffered the water-bottle with the other.

“ ’Ave a drop, sir. It’ll buck you up.”

The lieutenant looked at him stupidly, powerless to take the flask.

“ Pore little kid ! ” said Bill. In a moment he was kneeling beside his officer, with the boy’s head nestled in the hollow of his arm and the flask at the pale lips.

The young lieutenant breathed deeply, and intelligence returned to the eyes as the lids fluttered over them.

“ Thanks, Prior,” he said with a weak smile. “ I’m all right now.

Think the sun must have touched me." He shot an inquiring look along the trench.

"All quiet, sir. Nothing to do but wait for supports. They ain't botherin' us at all for the minute. You just take things easy for a bit, sir."

As the soldier said, for the moment all was quiet in the trench. The attacking line, not strong enough of itself to press its success farther, was recovering from its exhaustion. After the constant rip-rip of rifle fire in which the men had been striving for a length of time—it might have been hours or minutes, that they could not compute—the hush seemed almost uncanny. It was only a relative hush. Overhead the rushing shells screamed



without cessation as they interlaced their invisible courses from side to side of the battlefield. The vast, ever-gathering, pealing roar of massed artillery continued as it had continued from the early dawn, a spacious background of sound for the sharper noises of bursting shrapnel and crackling rifles. But this uproar was no longer noticeable ; the men's ears were insensible to it as the city dweller's ears receive without reporting the perpetual clamour of traffic. The absence of sounds directly concerning them seemed indeed a hush.

“ Gawd ! ” cried Alf suddenly, “ if one o' them beggars 'asn't pipped me ! Never noticed it till now.”

Bill and the lieutenant looked, to

see blood exuding in an enlarging patch on the soldier's dirty trousers.

"Fall out to the rear!" ordered Bill, with grim sarcasm.

"Not me! Not much I don't! Catch me going down that blasted 'ill again! Look at it now!"

The hillside below them, empty of any living thing, was being flicked into a myriad tiny spouts of dust. Above the slope a constant succession of whitish smoke puffs burst with a vicious suddenness out of the hazy air. They seemed to be produced from nothing by an invisible demon conjurer. A hostile battery, unable to touch the trench close under the crest of the hill, was determinedly forbidding the approach to it of supports. Bill looked down

at the tortured slope, and up at the summit of the hill close above. It was a rounded dome of grass against a blue sky, utterly deserted, strangely peaceful.

“ Catch me goin’ down there ! ” asserted the wounded man. “ This ’ere ain’t nothin’, either,” he added, having completed a nearer examination of his injury. “ Just said good-day like as ’e passed. Lend us yer ’ankercher, Bill. I’ve lost mine.”

Bill produced a dirty piece of rag, with which his comrade made a bandage.

“ Lost a lot of men coming up, didn’t we ? ” asked the young officer, gazing at the wound with a fascinated stare. He had not found the energy to move from his huddled position.

“ We did, sir,” replied Bill. “ Awful lot. More’n ’arf B Company, I should say. They got it full in the eyes when they got to the wire. We ain’t got nothing to crow over, neither. Colour-sergeant’s down, and—I believe—Lieutenant Symes.”

“ Good Lord, man ! Not—not—Symes ! ”

“ Yes, sir,” said Bill, giving his comrade a final assistance with the knot. “ Leastways, I don’t know if he’s killed, sir—but I saw ’im drop.”

“ Out there ? ” cried the young lieutenant, pointing to the slope where the wire hung twisted from stake to stake under the haze in which the shrapnel lit and crashed. “ Good Lord ! How awful ! ”



Bill finished his surgery, and looked with concern at the boy.

“ ’Tain’t no good upsettin’ yourself, sir. It’s just their luck. Maybe ours inside another five minutes.”

Alf, feeling comfortable again, produced a pipe, and lit a dottle of stale tobacco that had lain in the bottom of the bowl since overnight. It promised a few whiffs.

“ Wonder what it feels like when you’re killed ? ” he queried philosophically. “ Just at the flash of it, I mean. Not the silly funk of it we all gets sometimes.”

“ Shut up ! ” said Bill authoritatively. “ There ain’t no good in thinking that sort of rubbish. What you got to do is to keep one eye on each flank and both eyes on your

front, listen to orders, sneak cover, an' shoot straight. That's what you got to do. Not go plaguin' about with ideas. I reckon when you're killed you're killed, and you don't know nothing about it. What's the good o' workin' yourself into a funk ? ”

“ I ain't funkin' ,” grumbled Alf. “ I was only wonderin'. Don't care if I do get killed sometimes.”

“ Killed ? You ? ” retorted Bill, scathingly. “ You'll get killed fallin' out o' bed in the work'ouse. That's where you'll get killed.”

The idle receptivity with which the officer listened to this scrap of conversation quickened suddenly into interest. He was not an introspective lad. Beyond a vague anxiety as

to his behaviour in the stress of action during the days preceding this his first battle, he had known none of the torture of fear that so often assails the novice. That morning, in the excitement of the opening conflict, he had felt braced, strangely elated, keen, his psychological state a replica of that he had experienced often when the teams fronted each other on the football field. He had been mad since, out of himself. Now, the morbid curiosity which had just flashed up in the soldier's mind communicated itself to him, finding in his exhausted nerves a field facile of disturbance. He repeated the question to himself. What was it like to be killed? The menace of death—death! one could

scarcely realize it in cold blood—was very close. What was it like? Would he know, too, by experience? “Just their luck—maybe ours,” the soldier’s words rang in his ears. It was a tremendous possibility close to him. The shells still screeched overhead, and burst in futile wrath over the empty hillside below him, but he thought not of them. His mind was trying to come to grips with the abstract. What was it like? He tried desperately to imagine, and gazed at blankness.

There was a sudden stir in the trench. The whistles shrilled. Alf thrust his pipe into his pocket, and he and his comrade snatched up their bayoneted rifles. Lieutenant Athelstan sprang to his feet, shouting

an automatic order to the remnant of his half-company. A counter attack ?

There was a scurry of khaki figures at the end of the trench.

“ Hooray ! ” cried Bill. “ The supports ’ave worked round ! Now ! you— ! ” he added, addressing the invisible enemy.

The lieutenant forgot his speculations. His intimate personality disappeared. He was again an engineer at his post among the machinery of war. He assembled his half-company, numbered it, ascertained without a qualm that half was missing, gave a few brief instructions to the surviving sergeant, and reloaded his revolver. Then he waited, with a dignified stiffness, behind the crouch-



ing line of men. All along the trench the same little bustle, the same wait, occurred. The action was significant. The regiment was going to move. In a few minutes it would be out in the open again. Men looked fondly at the littered ditch which had meant a security that, notwithstanding the screaming shells, seemed absolute by contrast with what they had endured and were again to confront. They shifted impatiently from foot to foot, anxious to get the parting over. Still the regiment waited.

Lieutenant Athelstan raised his glance to see a khaki figure crawling, almost stomach-flat, up the green dome of grass. Up, up, it went until for a second a bare head broke

the silhouette of the summit against the sky. The scout gazed over into the mysterious region at the other side, and then wriggled back as fast as human disabilities for serpentine locomotion permitted. The regiment held its breath. What had he seen? The scout slid feet foremost into the trench, and, for the young lieutenant, was swallowed up.

The wait prolonged itself, minute after minute.

Suddenly the lieutenant saw his captain running towards him. A rough bandage was twisted round his forehead. The lieutenant saluted, impassible. The captain nodded.

“All right, Athelstan? Good! Move off to the right, and work over the shoulder. Then straight

ahead. Keep the men together, but don't let 'em bunch. We shall find the Fourth Brigade making for the neck there. The Seventh is in support. Good luck ! ”

The battle-roar had suddenly increased. The captain was shouting at the top of his voice, but his subordinate caught the words with difficulty. They seemed to be cut off at the speaker's mouth as by a gale of wind.

The lieutenant saluted.

“ Good, sir. At once ? ”

“ When you hear my whistle.”

He looked to see the reason of the increased noise. The erstwhile peaceful summit was a volcano in fury. Livid flames flared ceaselessly amid a dirty-yellow pall of smoke

The sky was blotted out. The splitting crash of bursting lyddite was a percussion on the ears that threatened permanent deafness. Like a thin, high-pitched cry of defiance, the whistles pierced the din.

The khaki line scrambled out of the trench, and, bent forward with rifles at the trail, moved off to the right.

“Steady! Steady! Don’t hurry!” cried the young lieutenant, as some men, nervously impatient, broke into a run. His voice was swallowed in the vast metallic clamour of the guns.

They worked round the circumference of the dome until it was revealed as the end of a spur of the bare downs. Before them the ridge receded horseshoe fashion.

Below them the hollow of the horse-shoe was filled with brown soldiers running forward. In front of the running soldiers an abandoned trench scarred the dull green turf. Their successful attack had taken it in reverse. Over the heads of the running soldiery the demon conjurer flung smoke-puffs in handfuls. Under each smoke-puff a hole was punched in the brown robe that was being drawn over the green slope. It was filled up again in an instant. Before them on the ridge of the horseshoe was nothing. Neither man, horse, nor gun was visible on the suave contour of the close-cropped downs.

The regiment from the trench, aligned at an angle on the hillside, pressed forward at the double, some-



what ahead of the attacking brigade below. Every eye in the line was fixed anxiously on the bare ridge that confronted them.

“ There ain’t nothing there, Bill,” cried Alf, as he ran painfully onward, water-bottle and bayonet-sheath leaping on his thigh. “ Where are the—? ”

Ere Bill could reply the bare ridge answered.

With a long, sharp, splintering sound, vivid like lightning against the heavy background of the artillery roar, a storm of bullets sped towards them. It struck the regiment as a gust of wind strikes washing on a clothes-line. There was a tumult of arms flung into the air, and bodies that leaped and twisted in the blast

as the regiment threw itself prone upon the ground.

"There they are," growled Bill with a curse. He turned to look at the comrade by his side. Alf was rolling convulsively face downward on the turf. Without raising himself, Bill turned him over. Their eyes met.

"They've got me, Bill," said Alf, with a look that showed recognition was an effort. His eyes glazed. He muttered something. Oblivious of the drone of bullets overhead, Bill put his ear close to catch the words. They came in a strangely matter-of-fact tone. "W—well, I'm tired, dad. I think I'll turn in. Oh—you've blown out the light! 'Arf-a-mo!—I—-" He was dead.

“ Well, 'e knows now,” said Bill to himself. “ Pore old Alf ! ”

The whistles shrilled again. In very open order the regiment rose and ran towards its goal. It was speedily punched into isolated figures. The whistles shrieked desperately. The isolated figures dropped, chancing the cover that they found. Officers, cursing, crawled among them, and the isolated figures wriggled closer together.

Lieutenant Athelstan looked for his captain, but found him not. That officer was a heap in the brown line of such, fifty yards back. The young lieutenant was in command of the company. He perceived the O.C. snugly ensconced in a slight depression, and caught his eye. He was

waved down. Overhead the bullets whined viciously, passing with a sudden tang of sound. Others, better aimed, plipped into the ground or snicked up the turf as they rose in ricochet. Here and there men lying down in the line sprang up, and fell heavily or kicked in a sudden convulsion, and then lay oddly still. Occasionally one sat up swiftly, with hands tearing at his coat, his face blanched with terror, shrieking aloud in fear of the death which had just claimed him. Speedily he lurched and tumbled. The bullets sped through the air in droves, pitiless, whining in their hunger for a victim.

It was rifle-fire alone which kept the regiment lying there, a long,

broken line of brown on the bare hillside. No shrapnel broke above them. The enemy's guns were busy with the advancing Fourth Brigade.

Lieutenant Athelstan looked back into the distant landscape which stretched below him. It seemed strangely normal, save that a rick was on fire in a farmstead enclosed by a group of trees. The level plain reaching far back into the misty distance, with its little islands of woods and villages, seemed uncanny in its emptiness of human beings when one realized the roaring medley of clashing sounds, each trying to overtop the other, which filled the air. As he gazed, the lieutenant perceived a line of swiftly moving black specks crossing an open field. He



knew it for a battery changing position at full gallop. Suddenly a gray cloud, that might almost have been dust, blotted out the line of specks. When it cleared, half the specks were motionless on the field. "D—n!" said the lieutenant. "Battery out of action—and we wanted 'em!" No thought of the men there swept violently out of life came into his mind. He regretted the battery, the war machine.

Nevertheless, other batteries were apparently more successful, for as he turned his gaze again to the bare down which was their goal, he saw a row of white puffs break out against its brow. The white puffs multiplied, congregating now here, now there, anon running along it

from end to end. Their number was maintained, increased, until they seemed to hang like a thin line of white cloud against the ridge. In the vast tumult of the battle the noise of the particular little hell that they were making was indistinguishable. Over the prone regiment the drone of bullets diminished, dying away to a point, whence it rebounded in little angry gusts.

The lieutenant looked again to his superior, while his men fingered the scanty stock of cartridges in pockets and bandolier. He lay down again to the bidding of the negative shake of the head.

Suddenly he heard a murmur of many voices. He glanced back to see the khaki flood of the Fourth

Brigade rushing forward. It was yelling like a pack of hounds in full cry ; the unison of its couple of thousand throats, swallowed up in the immense noise of the conflict, came just audible to his ears. Over its head the shrapnel broke in sharp vicious splashes of smoke and tiny flame. The brigade was borne forward on a wave of excitement that for the moment obliterated the menace of destruction.

The whistles shrieked anew along the recumbent regiment.

“ Now we’re off again,” said Bill to himself as he rose to his feet. Then, remembering, he stopped, and hurriedly transferred sundry clips of cartridges from a dead man’s pockets to his own. In a moment he was

sprinting forward to get abreast of his own line. Close behind him sounded, faint in the splintering, crashing, roaring chaos of mad sound, the yells of the advancing brigade.

Bill did not yell. He ran with his lips drawn back over clenched teeth, trying to keep his wind. He looked to the right and left of him, and saw that he was in a line of similarly running figures, all silent, anxious, tired. Presently the line would flop down again to earth. Presently. He looked forward to that as a respite—a temporary withdrawal almost from the battle. Now? No, the line still ran on, desperately using up its last energies. The hostile rifle-fire had greatly increased, although he did not specially notice it. Here

and there he saw a man throw up his arms and fall. Gradually he became aware that the intervals in the line were wider, much wider. But the line still ran on, the confused murmur of the following brigade ever in its rear.

On, on. Would the race never end? Would the whistles never shriek out a halt? With heart thumping, with sight blurred, with every sense whelmed in the confusion of utter fatigue, Bill ran grimly on, striving not to stumble. No longer did he see the distant goal ahead. He ran blindly, in a smother. He seemed to have been running for an eternity. Another moment and he must drop. His empty stomach felt as though on the verge of revul-



sion. His muscles weakened ; his head was dizzy. Yet he ran. Would they never stop ?

The sky in front of him was suddenly split with a violent report. At the same moment he felt himself trip and fall. Thank God ! The fates had willed it. He would not get up for a minute. He would rest—rejoin later, he thought vaguely. His head swam in a chaos of noise ; his eyelids drooped ; he felt himself slide comfortably down into oblivion, sleep. A tumult of cries ; the thunder and shake of a thousand boots upon the turf roused him. A fear flashed into his mind. The advancing Fourth Brigade ! He would be trampled ! He must move out of the way—get up. He willed

the movement, then gasped in sudden terror. He could not stir. He was hit! That shell—! The sweat broke out upon his forehead.

There was a roar as of the sea over his head. The Fourth Brigade was passing. Interminable was its passage. With dimming sight he had a vague vision of swiftly moving boots, thousands of them—thousands! They threatened his head, his face. A spasm of awful fear convulsed him, and then—instantaneously—it was blackness.

He had been dreaming. He woke to an awful consuming thirst. Of that only was he clearly conscious. Water! Water! He panted for it, burning with an interior flame that scorched. Water! One drop! If

he could only get at his flask ! With a mighty effort he concentrated his will on the action. His arm did not move. It seemed no longer his. His senses slid away from him. Again blackness.

What had he been dreaming of ? He strove to recall the vision. He was gazing at it suddenly. The river where he bathed as a boy ! It was water—water glinting in the sun. It was real. He stood on the bank and laughed. Water ! He had only to dive. He dived.

With a roar of cheers the Seventh Brigade rushed over his body, coming into the fight to support the Fourth.

In that mad surge forward of the regiment Lieutenant Athelstan had felt anew the glow and thrill familiar

to him when, on the school playing-fields, the team he captained had raced victoriously towards their opponent's goal. As he ran, a few paces behind the line of men, he shouted glad words of encouragement—orders that were unnecessary duplications, wild cries that were the expression of the primitive man in him, awaking now in the æon-old circumstances of strife and danger. The roar of the battle drowned his voice—he could not hear it himself—but the utterance, high-pitched, of these useless sounds was as much cause as symptom of the intoxication which whirled him forward. His earlier fatigue was replaced by the febrile activity of sensitive nerves under high stimulant. He was

drunk with the heady wine of a battle rush. The bullets fled past him. Men in front reeled, pitched, tumbled, or dropped like a marionette whose string is suddenly severed. He noticed these things not, or perceived them as in a dream, forgetting the fallen figure as he passed it. The shrapnel broke out above them in a chain of aerial explosions, decimating the line. He heeded it not. "On, on! you—!" he shouted, with oaths normally strange to his young lips. The line, torn, broken, pressed forward under an endless series of crashing shells, and the fierce drone of their bullets as they escaped and spread. On! On!

The whistles sounded. The line dropped to earth, spent and panting



—a long, widespread row of exhausted men. With the halt the battle-fever ebbed in the young lieutenant. He looked at his men, and was suddenly anxious. The pace had been too fast. They must be nursed a little if they were to make the final rush. The O.C. had edged near to him in the dash forward, and was now lying prone a dozen yards away, frowning at the still distant ridge through his field-glasses. The lieutenant performed a swift sprint, crouching, and flung himself down by his side.

“In command—C Company, sir,” he shouted.

“Eh?” queried his superior at the top of his voice. It was trying to talk in a gale.

The lieutenant repeated his statement with the full power of his lungs.

"Men badly done up, sir," he added.

The officer nodded.

"Can't help it," he shouted back. "Orders. Press hard and swiftly. We've got to make 'em nervous—give the flank attack a chance. Don't matter if we're used up. We're not deciding it." He peered again through his glasses. "We'll wait till the brigade gets up. Keep your men in hand, lieutenant."

The lieutenant deduced the sentences from the isolated words he caught from the roar and crash of sound which all but drowned them. He saluted and dodged back to his

place, unscathed. His superior's phrases repeated themselves in his brain as he lay waiting. "Don't matter if we're used up. We're not deciding it." They were the Open Sesame to an unexpected flood of bitterness. All those men lying killed out there had thrown their lives away on a sham. Other people, far away, were deciding the battle. For a moment his human feelings got the better of his brain, soldier-trained to the necessity of such sacrifices. He cursed in resentment. Then, mastering himself, he crawled among the twenty isolated figures which represented his company, and brought them in closer touch with one another. With a faint curiosity he looked for the two men who had talked of death

in the trench. They were not there. Killed ! A memory of his previous introspections returned. He thought of them with a sudden qualm. They knew now.

The whistles blew. The line rose and plunged forward. Without warning, the lieutenant found himself among a swarm of men. The brigade had come up, had got out of hand. It no longer yelled. The lieutenant spurted, and drove his company forward ahead of the brigade.

Then began an endless series of little rushes and sudden drops to earth. How long it lasted no man in the line could tell. The time passed as in a dream, where years of experience are measured by minutes on the clock. All they knew was

that they were pressing nearer, ever nearer to their goal. The roar of artillery, the crash of shells, the whine of bullets were sounds that had accompanied them since the beginning of existence.

Suddenly the lieutenant found himself close under the sharp rise of a hill. His approaches to it had left no picture on his memory ; they were a dream forgotten. Under a fierce burst of fire the line dropped to earth, and found itself screened. Behind it the brigade crowded up. The line waited. Further progress up that hill, in face of the devastating storm of lead which swept it, was impossible. No one attempted movement. The wait continued, minute after minute. Above them an in-



ferno of noise dominated all other sounds. The screech of their own shells as they flew to disrupt against the defence was scarcely audible.

Still the attack waited—waited. It was as though it were huddled against an invisible barrier. The lieutenant looked up and saw nothing, only short blades of grass on the line of the hill against the sky. The blades of grass trembled, bowed at a uniform angle. The noise was paralysing in its volume and intensity. Men gave quick, frightened glances towards the rear, but did not move. In the long protracted suspense the lieutenant felt that he had lain there for an eternity of time—felt that he was held there for an eternity of the future. Again the thought of the

two philosophers who had discussed death sprang into his mind—leaping thither from an obscure fear that gathered, and was resolutely held back in dark recesses of his soul. They had talked with such calm self-possession those men, unharassed by any warning presage. They had been in every way normal, and now they were lying dead back there under the pall of flying shells. Was it always like that? Was there no secret presentiment of the spirit? Would it take him thus? No, it was unthinkable. He looked back suddenly along a vista of his life, and his individuality appeared to him as a very real thing. That individuality was something too vital, too powerful to come to an end,

without warning or reason, here. It was grotesque to think that he had passed already through so many experiences, had journeyed so many miles to get to this hillside to go no farther, that here everything stopped. Thus the nervous activity of the young lieutenant, deprived of physical outlet, deprived of any view, save the bare slope in front, to distract it, clothed itself in disturbing thoughts. He combated them resolutely—stifling above all the sudden, bitter memory that this was only a feint attack, that he was risking his life on something that did not greatly matter.

The whistles ! His own repeated the call automatically almost. They were advancing. There was a lull in the noise above. On ! Up !

He ran, climbing the hill with swift feet, leaving his thoughts below him, forgotten. Suddenly he perceived the hostile trench, their goal. The nearness of it gave him a turn. He saw three busy figures grouped about a machine-gun. He saw men scramble up from the trench and dash crouching to the rear. He saw an officer standing calmly behind a line of levelled rifles tipped with steel. He looked into the dark hollows of the rifle barrels. He ran towards them, shouting. He saw the officer's hand rise. It went to his moustache. He saw his mouth open sharply, as if on a released spring. He saw the line of rifles spurt into flame. He heard nothing.

## THE CALL.

*An Incident in the American  
Civil War.*

THE regiment stood "at ease" in a clearing of the forest, a double line of men in tattered gray who leaned upon their rifles or lay or squatted down upon the turf. Behind it were other regiments in similar loose order, forming in all a brigade whose total strength was not greater than that of one new regiment. Behind the brigade stretched the forest, and in front the woods swept down to it over a



high ridge, and put forth little tongues of dark green into the field. The air was full of the crash and roll of battle. Over the tree-tops on the crest lowered a long, white cloud, wherein appeared at intervals little faint flashes like the reflection of distant lightnings. Overhead the sky was deep blue. To the right of the brigade a battery in the field banged away noisily and angrily at the ridge, like a pack of chained dogs barking at an enemy on the other side of a wall. The sonorous, soul-shaking thunder of the big guns, the ear-splitting crashes of musketry volleys, the faint note of a bugle, the yell and cheer of unseen foemen were evidence enough of close battle ; but, save for the apparently futile

clamours of the battery on the right, the clearing was at peace. The brigade was in reserve.

Sergeant Whitney of the right flank company of the —th Virginia, the regiment in the first line, leaned idly upon his rifle and surveyed, now the chattering groups of his comrades in arms, now his boots, from the broken leather of which his bare toes protruded, now the high mass of woodland in front. The unseen battle was evidently swelling to a crisis. Scattered shots rang out above the increasing uproar, followed immediately by peal on peal of musketry at no great distance. Patches of white smoke rose and hung above the trees on the slope. The world seemed quivering with the thunder

of heavy artillery. The angry battery on the right banged away more frantically than ever. Sergeant Whitney spat out a mouthful of tobacco juice and swore softly. He had been a parson before the war ; now he was merely a ragged soldier, hungry and irritated with suspense.

The men looked anxiously at each other and shuffled into their places. Some few fumbled with cartridges or the catch of the bayonet ; the most were calm, like men whose tools were ready for work to which they were accustomed. The ambulances stood alert, and the surgeons by the white-tilted wagon gave a glance over their open instrument cases, and the sponges and the water pails. At a little distance was a

group of officers, one of them gesticulating excitedly.

At last an officer left the group, and walked swiftly towards the waiting regiments. A bugle call rang out, and the lines of men stiffened instantly to "Attention." A murmur of relief ran along the ranks. Men joked in hopeful tones. All were eager for the expected advance.

"Here come the orders, siure."—"Ole Marse Robert can't keep us out o' this."—"Moth—er! I want my Yankee boots!"—"I reckon I'll stroll over an' get a new shirt in a minute."—"Doan't fergit to bring along some of old Abe's rations, Yank!—I got up without my breakfast this morn."

So the quips ran along the line as

the men tightened the belts on their lean figures ; but as the roar of battle swelled ever louder and louder and still the orders did not come, they died away into anxious silence.

Sergeant Whitney watched, with the tense earnestness of a wild creature on the brink of a life-and-death struggle, the gap in the woods where a rough track debouched on to the clearing.

Thence, he felt sure, the messenger would come.

Long he watched—how long he did not know—and every man in the regiment watched with him. The thought : Were they forgotten ? began to shape itself in the mind of each. Suddenly a man on a staggering horse appeared at the gap,



waved wildly, and horse and man fell prone.

The bugle call, the order, and the advance were simultaneous. "Don't yell, men!" shouted the officers, as the gray lines tipped with steel swept forward at a run. R-r-r-rub-a-dub, r-r-r-rub-a-dub, came feverishly from the drums.

The regiment dashed into the woods, its right flank, and consequently Sergeant Whitney, on the track. He passed the body of the staff-officer who had signalled the advance. The gold-laced coat was drenched with blood. The dead horse lay on him.

The woods were filled with savage outcries and a distracting rattle of musketry. The heavy thunder of

the main battle was still heard, but only as a deep threatening accompaniment to these sharper sounds. Suddenly a torrent of frightened men dashed down on to the regiment, striving up the slope and keeping its alignment somehow, despite the trees. The feverish beat of the drums whipped it forward.

“Hei! Hei! Out of the road, you!” shouted the line, pushing its way doggedly through the rush.

“Rally in the rear of the Virginians!” cried the officers of the beaten men, striking right and left with the flat of their swords. “Rally with the colours!”

But the fugitives ran blindly, with blanched, drawn faces, and were deaf to everything but the roar

of terrible menace which filled their world.

Still the regiment pushed on up the hillside, the line, though drawn thin, holding yet together.

Another rush of fugitives surged past them, to the cry of "The woods are on fire!"—"The woods are burning!"

Sergeant Whitney glanced at the red and white of the battle-flag as it fluttered onward through the trees, and kept his company in alignment by it. The drums beat a frenzied measure.

The great rush of fugitives was over; only stragglers now ran past. The crash of battle was incessant, as though the earth were being knocked to pieces in some titanic struggle.

with the lightning. In front, long wreaths of smoke stretched themselves heavily between the tree trunks. A constant rain of leaves and twigs fell from above. The line, pressing after the flag, stumbled every moment over prone bodies. Some could still cry : " Goo—od boys ! Give 'em h—ll ! "—" Bully fer ole Virginny ! " Many were silent.

Without shot or yell, the regiment strove steadily upwards. To the men it seemed that they had been struggling through those woods for an eternity. A vicious shell blasted a tree-top in their front, but so far they had seen no enemy.

Ahead of them a few gray-clad soldiers were firing quickly from

behind the trees. As the line swept upwards, these men joined it.

“ You’ll see the darned Bluebellies in a minute,” said one calmly.

He was right. Not a minute had elapsed, when a cheering line of the blue-uniformed men burst through the smoke-wreaths, their colours bravely flaunting in advance. They were not twenty yards away.

Whitney looked at his captain.

“ Now, boys—let ’em have it ! ”

Instantly the opposing lines burst into flame and noise, and a thick white cloud rolled between them like a wall. A man at the sergeant’s side was flung violently down by an invisible hand. He caught a glimpse of the colours tossing in the smoke like a sapling wrestling with a



gale, and he shouted to the men to press on.

With a yell the line dashed forward, bayonets levelled, into the bank of smoke. It stumbled over little heaps of prostrate bodies.

There were shouts and a faint clash of steel. Sergeant Whitney plunged his bayonet into a dark figure that loomed up suddenly ghost-like through the mist. But *mêlée* there was not ; the blue line had given way.

At that moment the call came.

It was not a voice that Sergeant Whitney heard ; it was not a physical contact that attracted his attention ; it was nothing visible that beckoned. Yet, deep down in him, the little still germ of his soul, quiet and

remote from the roar and turmoil of the battle where his will and his body were striving, had certainly responded to a call. A sixth sense had awakened in him, tingling, and had received a message his unaccustomed brain could not decipher. Involuntarily he stopped for a moment, rapt from his surroundings. Then he heard the voices of the officers urging the regiment, of which, so long as he was hale, the disciplined soldier was an integral, inseparable part. R-r-r-rub-a-dub-dub, rolled the drum, and the fluttering colours and the gray line swept forward out of the bank of smoke.

The air was alive with bullets. Men stumbled and tripped in odd ways every moment. Some seemed

to be suddenly knocked on the head by an unseen club. Some sank down as though tired. A Valkyrie shriek passed overhead, and a tree on the right disappeared in a small hell of flame and smoke. The crash of the shell was scarcely distinguishable above the prevailing roar and crash of the battle.

Suddenly the regiment emerged from the trees on to a plateau. A breeze rolled a heavy cloud of smoke across it, and revealed, when it had passed, numerous blue figures dashing away from the regiment to a blue line at the other side. Many rolled over or fell forward, of whom a few got up and limped slowly on again. A battery was getting into position there. The Virginians could

clearly see the wheeling horses and the agile gunners as they leaped from the limbers and ran to and fro. Smoke-puffs dotted the ground all round them.

On the right a gray regiment was blazing away, stabbing a wall of smoke with a thousand darts of flame, and yelling like a pack of fiends. On the left there was a scurry of horsemen, wrapped in a yellow cloud. In front was the blue battery, still silent.

The regiment halted and formed its line anew. It had lost touch with its brigade in the forest. Sergeant Whitney looked to his officers, as the company closed its ranks. The lieutenant was in command.

All at once the hostile battery dis-

appeared in a white cloud. There was a crash, loud above the persistent crashes on every side, a multitude of shrill whistlings, and a cry of anguish. The line was shot into great gaps.

“Lie down, men; lie down!” yelled the subaltern of the company.

They flung themselves down among the bleeding bodies of their comrades. The rolling thunder of a cavalry charge was heard, split with repeated rifle volleys.

The call came again to Sergeant Whitney.

That still, small soul of him, contemptuous or unconscious of the clamouring menace of sudden death which beset its earthly envelope, reiterated its mysterious message. For



a moment again the will of the soldier, backed as it was by habit and discipline, was submerged. He made an unwilling movement to rise. Then self-control and consciousness returned. He knocked down with his fist a man who tried to jump up and run away, and sank back to his old position again, his eyes fixed on the young subaltern.

Again the battery belched forth a rolling cloud, and again the grape-shot whistled shrilly, overhead and harmless this time. Behind it and on its left flank, the regiment heard a wild yell, the battle-slogan of the South. The brigade had come up.

Almost at the same moment, a long line of blue, gleaming where the sun flashed on its uneven fringe of steel,

commenced to run towards the regiment. The battery opened with shell on the recumbent line of gray. A mounted officer galloped towards the Virginians, passing careless and unscathed through the rain of death. He sought the brigadier and a little group of officers clustered in the rear among the trees.

Sergeant Whitney, and every man in gray, smiled a grim smile as he gazed towards the advancing line of blue. Each laid a few cartridges and his ramrod on the ground by his side, and rested his weapon comfortably against his cheek as he looked along the sights and picked his man. There was no hurry. The little subaltern twirled his moustache maliciously.

The blue line was three parts

across ere the word of command sent a sheet of fire from the prostrate regiment, and curtained them in dense smoke. Death frolicked at the other side of the veil. Then there was swift biting of cartridges, and only the general uproar drowned the clang of the ramrods in the barrels as the charges were pressed home. Another volley had ripped into the curtain before a few scattering shots came from the invisible enemy. Yet one more volley and the line rose, as one man, erect.

Above the din came the notes of a bugle and the roll of drums sounding the charge. "Forward, men!" yelled the officers, and, following the dancing battle-flags, the brigade swept forward into the smoke, the

slogan pealing from a thousand throats.

As he dashed on with his company, every faculty alert and his head buzzing with battle-madness, Sergeant Whitney heard the call again. An almost irresistible impulse urged him to run off at a tangent, an impulse which for the smallest fraction of a second overmastered the soldier's instinct that keeps him with his regiment. He had to fight it, consciously, as he ran.

At the other side of the smoke-curtain he beheld the plateau covered with blue troops streaming back. The gray line yelled madly and dashed forward at its fastest. It surged over such blue groups as it overtook like the sea over wreckage.

Another battery galloped up and faced them boldly by the side of the first. Through a rift in a bank of smoke the sergeant caught a glimpse of a blue column moving at the double to its support.

“Steady, boys!” he cried to his men, who were widening their intervals in the hot pace of the charge. “Close up! Close up!”

A little knot of men in blue turned and faced them with spitting muskets. His company overran them in a short interlude of stabbing steel and whirling butts, and pressed on with scarce a check.

They were close to the batteries now. The blue column had fallen into line of battle. They could see the white teeth of the men as they



laughed. The gray line slackened speed perceptibly. "On! on!" shrieked the officers. The flags dashed forward, and the line followed with a yell that, for an instant, drowned the roar of contest.

Then hell opened for the line of gray. A mass of flame spurted into their faces, and a crash of awful thunder shook the very ground under their feet. The brigade went down like grain before the storm. A smother of dense smoke hid everything; bullets sped through it in sheets. Flags and leaders were no longer visible; men clamoured, and could not be heard in the incessant volleys that poured Death on to them.

Sergeant Whitney threw himself

upon the ground, and shouted orders to his men. He could not hear them himself. He strained his eyes in the smoke, but could see nobody. His one dominating thought was : The Company. It was gone from him. He crawled along the ground to his left, and dimly perceived a man lying down. He shouted to him. The man did not move. He crawled nearer and touched him. The man was dead. Beyond him he discerned a heaped and contorted row through a sudden lift in the smoke. The company no longer existed. He lay still, using the dead body as a breastwork. The fire at the other side of the smoke scarcely seemed to slacken.

“ Now’s their time for the counter-

stroke, if they weren't such blame cowards," said the sergeant to himself. He treated the matter impersonally, hopelessly. The company was gone; the regiment, too, most likely.

He reloaded his rifle, and helped himself to the dead man's cartridges, while the bullets tore through the smoke above his head. He did not shift his position. There was no use in moving. He lay still, and waited for something, anything. He felt, now that he was inactive, that his nerves were shaken "all to pieces."

Then the call came again to him, this time imperiously. That wonderfully discovered sixth sense of his was electric with it, like a telegraph

machine frantically clicking in a deserted office. He—the whole mind of him—was forced to pay attention, yet he could not understand. Something—somebody—was calling him with the vehemence of despair. He looked, suddenly, involuntarily to the right of him. There was nothing but smoke. A feeling, which seemed not to originate with him, possessed him that he must run quickly in that direction. He strove against it, trying to ridicule it, but his overstressed nerves gave way. The enemy was still firing wildly over his head. The regiment was gone. He *must* go ; he *must* run thither. Whither ? He did not know.

As if suddenly galvanized, he

sprang to his feet and ran, crouching, through the smoke. The bullets sped past him. It was already a miracle that he was not killed. On he ran, like an automaton set into action by an extra-human power. He did not think. He willed nothing. He ran onwards—swiftly.

He stumbled on to a hedge, and followed it. The smoke was thinner here, but he saw no one. To the crash of battle which filled his ears he was habituated, and he no longer noticed it. He heard the Yankee cheer of the counter-stroke, delivered at last, but did not heed it. He ran on steadily, mechanically, at his best pace. A curious anxiety filled him.

Presently, following the hedge, he



ran into a wood, and the hedge-ditch became a tiny stream. There had been a fierce fight here. Bodies littered the ground. Smoke coiled itself up from the underwood. A tree was blazing. But he saw no living men, and the battle-roar seemed not so loud. He followed the stream with unconscious purpose.

Suddenly he heard a couple of quick shots in front of him. He seemed to think he heard a scream, but in the thunder of the battle he could not be sure. He ran faster, without considering why he should be interested in two shots and a scream amid such an uproar and so much agony.

A few yards brought him unexpectedly into a clearing. A log hut

stood in the middle of it, from the window of which a film of smoke curled out. Half a dozen blue uniformed corpses lay in the open space. As he approached he saw that the door was broken in. The tree-trunk used as a battering-ram lay on the threshold with a dead man across it.

He stepped over the obstruction and entered. He knew—without asking himself, why?—that this was the end of his journey. The hut was murky with smoke.

A gigantic negro and a soldier lay side by side. The soldier had bayoneted the negro, and the black had throttled him with a death-grip. The body of another soldier lay in a corner. Stretched out on the floor was a woman—a white woman—dead.

The soldier fell away from Sergeant Whitney at the shock of it, and left him a parson again. Gravely he took off his cap, and his lips muttered solemn words. Bending down to the woman in the murky hut, it seemed to him, suddenly, that he must know her. He turned her over and looked at her face. He did not know it, and yet it seemed not unfamiliar. It was the face of one who might have been a friend. The lips were parted as though still uttering a call for help.

Sergeant Whitney stood up again, and his legs trembled under him. An overpowering heaviness and fatigue weighed him down. He felt like one awaking from a trance, with an irresistible desire for sleep. He

staggered out of the hut into the sunshine and fell, full length, into deep slumber.

Some hours later, when the battle had ceased and the stars shone upon a world strangely silent after an eternity of infernal noise, Sergeant Whitney managed to rejoin the fifty survivors of his regiment. He had a pair of new Yankee boots upon his feet and four pairs slung round his neck or in his hands. The others were no good.

In the clearing, a cross marked a new grave.

## IN THE CORN.

A STILLNESS surpassing that of the Sabbath lay upon the countryside. There was a complete cessation of those faint sounds of activity in the landscape which are so habitual that the ear marks only the absence of them. No sheep bleated on the hillsides ; no cattle lowed in the valleys ; no ploughboy's whip cracked over a straining team upon the brown fields ; no wagon rumbled, creaking and clanking, along the highways ; no machine whirled and hummed in the rickyards. The



customary though unnoticed vibrations of human voices murmuring on field or farm or road were stilled. The country was deserted. The fields stretched away into the distance without ever a human figure or a domesticated animal to break the solitude. The highway for mile on mile was an undisturbed parade-ground for strutting pheasants. The farmhouses lay in deathly silence, their windows shuttered and barred, their courtyards bare, a swinging stable door announcing, with a forlorn gesture, the desolation of abandonment. Yet the roads were in good condition ; the fields were yellow with the ripening crops ; the farmyards held the hay harvest in rick and barn. Only human beings

and their portable or drivable livestock had disappeared.

The roads by which their disappearance was effected were strewn with household goods, fragments of clothing, torn paper in abundance, broken boards, shards of crockery, tinware, children's toys, and more paper, for the gravely strutting pheasants to meditate upon. At intervals a smashed bicycle lay by the wayside, or a farm wagon, top heavy with a load of furniture, lurched in the ditch whither, minus a wheel, it had been roughly pushed. Some fearful terror, strange to conceive in the hushed calm which lay over the scene, had driven the inhabitants pell-mell along that road. A madly rushing stream of humanity had

poured, evidently, for long hours over its smooth surface, and a dark stain here and there upon the dust marked yet some fierce eddy in the stream.

The terror which had swept the countryside lay over it still—an invisible presence. Such travellers as entered the solitude were mounted men, in companies of not less than two or three, and more frequently in squadrons of a couple of score, who advanced with the utmost caution along the deserted roads. These men were khaki-clad and bronzed. A rifle nosed itself into a leathern bucket on the right, and a sword hung on the left of their saddles, and a variety of other articles, oddly domestic, adorned that

useful piece of horse-furniture wherever there was strap-hold. They were soldiers. They jogged along with a professional air of nonchalance, joking and laughing, apparently heedless of any lurking menace. In reality, sight and hearing were sharply alert for any figure on the skyline, for any sound, however faint, that might disturb the stillness. Every turn of the road was approached with apprehension ; every hill was ascended in company with an anxious query as to what lay upon its farther slope ; every adjacent wood brought a halt, while one or two dismounted men, with rifles held ready, advanced to ask it a question whose answer might be death. Some hundreds of yards to the right and left, isolated

troopers rode over the fields on a course parallel to that of the jogging cavalcade, silent and remote, like diminished Brocken spectres. The squadron watched anxiously for a sudden wave of the arm by one of these preoccupied, steadily advancing figures. It would have responded to the signal as instantaneously as a ship's engines stop or race full speed ahead or astern at the sudden behest of the clanging telegraph. These men were trained to regard the terror which had driven the rustic population headlong as a mere danger to be warily encountered.

One of these flanking scouts stopped suddenly, as though hesitating to give credence to his perceptions. Then he put spurs to his horse, and gal-



loped over the crest of the hill where he had halted, disappearing into a little valley on its farther side. The sight he had seen was sufficiently rare in this abandoned land to be a phenomenon demanding investigation. It was a wisp of smoke drifting from the chimney of a small farmhouse in the hollow before him.

The trooper halted again just above the farm in a position where he could look down upon the buildings. They were shuttered and apparently untenanted, in no way different from those of a dozen homesteads he had seen that morning, save for that suspicious drift of smoke. He looked at them carefully, doubtfully. At the closer view he perceived a small

upper window unshuttered, open. He waited, watching for some movement about the place. There was none. It was possible that the smoke came only from some abandoned fire. He cantered down the little lane, and clattered into the cobbled farmyard. No sign of life greeted him. He hammered at the door and shouted. He thought he saw a face looking at him from the upper window. He halloaed, and beat imperiously upon the door. There was a sound of bolts pushed back, and the door opened a couple of inches, till it was checked by a still attached chain.

“Are you one of our men?” asked a woman’s voice anxiously.

The trooper was too preoccupied

to indulge a sense of humour that might otherwise have been gratified by this naïve question.

“ Yes, yes,” he answered impatiently. “ Open the door. I want to talk to you.”

The door was pushed to while the chain was detached, and then opened again. A girl of about twenty, evidently a domestic, stood on the threshold.

“ Have you seen anybody about—any soldiers, I mean ? ” demanded the trooper.

The girl shook her head. She was evidently frightened.

“ Heard of any in the neighbourhood ? ”

“ No.”

“ Heard any guns ? ”

The girl's eyes opened a fraction wider.

"No. Are—are you going to fight?"

"Not just now. Presently, I expect. What are you doing here? This isn't a very safe place to be alone in."

"I'm not alone. Missus is upstairs, ill—can't be moved. Master will be in presently."

"All right," said the trooper, turning to go. "Take care of yourself, my dear."

"I say," said the girl.

The trooper turned back.

"Yes?"

"Are the Stourshire men with you? They're foot soldiers," she added to help him to identification.

"They're not far away."

"You don't know Tom Wetherby, I suppose?" she asked nervously.

"No; can't say I do."

"He comes from about here," she said in explanation. "I wanted to know if he's all right."

"I expect so," the trooper reassured her. "Don't worry. Good-bye, and look after yourself. Will that path take me back to the main road?"

"Yes."

The trooper clattered out with a wave of his hand. He heard the door closed and bolted behind him.

From the upper window the girl watched him cantering up the narrow path which climbed the hill, much



as a castaway watches a receding ship. He disappeared over the crest, and solitude again enveloped her. She sighed as the curtain which shut her off from her fellow creatures, lifted for a minute, dropped again. A weak voice behind her spoke from the bed.

“ Who was that, Milly ? ”

“ A soldier, ma’am. He wanted to know if we’d seen anybody about.”

“ Oh.” The voice expressed a faintness of all interest in human affairs.

A hush fell on the room. The girl stood looking out of the window, staring with a preoccupied gaze at the unchanging scene. At last the necessity for speech triumphed over

that constrained quiet which a sick-room imposes on all but the most garrulous.

"He said they'd be fighting presently, ma'am."

"Who said?"

"The soldier, ma'am."

"Oh dear!" The sick woman moaned querulously. "To think we should be in the thick of it here and I like this! O God!" she began to pray aloud.

The girl felt uncomfortable.

"He said this wasn't a very safe place to be in, ma'am," she said, not deliberately to make matters worse, but uttering the only thought in her mind in an effort to escape from this uncannily open communion with the Deity. It seemed to accentuate their

helplessness before the threatening danger.

The sick woman desisted from her prayers, and turned on her with a flash of febrile anger.

"I suppose you're afraid now!" she said scornfully. "Like all those cowards who ran off with the horses—thieving scoundrels. Well, go if you want to! Go!—and leave me to die here alone. Cowards!" she added, her voice falling to a whisper with her failing strength.

Tears came into the girl's eyes.

"I'm not a coward, ma'am," she asserted vehemently. "If I had been a coward I should have run off when the others did. I'm going to stay and look after you whatever

happens. It—it isn't fair to call me a coward ! ”

The sick woman was silent for a moment.

“ You're a good girl, Milly. Forgive me. I'm very ill—I don't know what I say.”

“ That's all right, ma'am. I'm glad to be looking after you.”

She turned to the window again, but her mind was occupied by a vision of that evening, forty-eight hours back, when one of the hands had rushed into the farm, shrieking : “ Run ! Run, all of ye ! The enemy be a-coming, burning and killing, they do say ! Run, men ! Look after your wives and childer ! Everybody's going as fast as legs can carry. The main road do be

black with people running. Pack up, master! Bring the missus down!"—She saw again the labourers flocking round the excited man, saw them catch at his panic, go mad with it. She saw her master pushing among them, burly and placid, but yet grimly anxious. "What's this? What's this? No, my men. Stay at home. You'll be safer there. You don't want to go running off all over the country."—She saw the man who had brought the news expostulating with him, gesticulating with clumsy gestures. "Ye must run, master, I tell ye! The enemy be surely coming. I did hear that all the housen at Tafnell Street were blazing, and men lying dead in the fire!"—"Non-



sense ! Nonsense ! You won't be hurt if you stay quietly at home as I'm going to do."—A tumult of panic cries had arisen at this. "Take no notice of him ! We must get out o' this ! If only I had a cart ! There be wagons enough surely in the yard, men ! And horses ! Get those horses out ! Get the horses out ! The horses !" —Then the master's voice : "Leave those horses alone ! Stand back, do ye hear ! I'll knock the first man down who touches one of 'em ! Stand off !" —Then again the tumult of cries : "Get him out o' the way ! The horses ! He can't go—him ! Down him ! We've got our wives and childer too ! Hit him, some one ! The horses !" There had been a

rush, cries, a blow with a block of wood, and the maddened mob had dashed over the unconscious master. She saw the hastily harnessed wagons lurching from side to side as they dashed down the lane to the labourers' cottages.

"Is the master in yet, Milly?" asked the invalid, waking from a sleep.

The sun was getting low as the girl looked out.

"Not yet, ma'am. Yes! he's coming round by the brook."

At that moment, in fact, the burly figure of the farmer appeared. He drove half a dozen cattle before him. Left alone on the farm, he personally watched the herd all day lest it should be reft from him as his horses had been.

The girl had his meal ready for him by the time he opened the kitchen door.

"All well?" he asked. "How's the missus?" Without waiting for a reply, he tramped heavily up the stairs to her.

Later, while eating, he made conversation with the girl as they sat together at the table.

"Where be this famous enemy, eh? Never a sound have I heard this day. Nor seen the sight of a human body.—Bah!—Those cowardly thieves would ha' done better to have stayed at home. I don't believe there is an enemy in these parts. And if there is, our boys'll soon make short work of 'em!—Foreigners!—Wonder where young

Tom Wetherby is? He do be a proper young fellow, eh, Milly? All right, my lass. I'll see it's a fine wedding after this. You'll be right proud of each other, you and him. You're a fine gal, Milly—and he's a brave lad, young Tom. He'll make them rascally foreigners run ! ”

In her bed that night the girl was awakened by a mysterious sound in the distance. It was an interminable succession of quick and heavy beats, as regular as a ticking clock, that merged into one great, hollow roar. This strange sound flowing across the silence of the night filled her with a vague dread. It was like the beating of some mighty heart made audible, the heart of the terror that had invaded this quiet countryside.

She lay listening to it, fascinated, and yet shuddering at the menace of the portent. She was beginning to drop off to sleep again, hypnotized by the unchanging rhythm of the sound, when a violent thud startled her into wakefulness. The windows rattled. What was it? The thud was repeated, again and again. She sat up in wild panic as the windows shook, awaiting she knew not what. Minute after minute she waited, but the thud recurred no more. The commander of some nervous battery of position, miles away, had ordered his guns to silence. The girl sank to sleep at last, in her ears the measured tramp of an army along the high road.

She dreamed of Tom Wetherby.

Her sleep was shattered by a clap



of thunder. It was morning. She sat up, half awake, doubting whether she had really heard anything. A second heavy crash and roll assured her that she had. A storm? She looked at the window. The sun was shining. The sky was blue. A third vast peal, caught up and sustained indefinitely, revealed her environment. Battle! She sprang out of bed and dressed herself hurriedly with trembling fingers.

Attired, she ran along to her mistress's room. The invalid was frantic with terror. She was shrieking.

"Jim! Jim!" She perceived the maid-servant. "Where is he? Oh, where is he? Oh, go and find him! Go and find him!"

The girl ran downstairs to look for

the farmer. He was not to be found. The door of the cowshed was open.

The noise, which had never ceased but only varied up and down in its intensity, leaped swiftly to one of its crashing climaxes as a heavy battery, near her but invisible, fired. She fled indoors, impelled by an instinctive, unreasoning dread of the lightning which in her experience accompanied abnormal aerial sound. The noise was terrific. It rolled in vast waves from side to side of the little valley. It permeated everything. The air quivered on her face. The staircase shook beneath her feet. The banisters vibrated under her hand as though smitten at the farther end. The house seemed flimsy, unsafe. The noise was more than deaf-

ening ; in its intermittent spasms of extreme violence it was blinding. It bewildered her. She held fast, desperately, to one idea—her mistress. She reached the room. It was filled with a chaos of noise, yet uncannily quiet in itself. The invalid had fainted.

The girl's first thought was to restore her. Then a merciful inspiration decided her to leave the sick woman unconscious. There would be nerve-racking anxiety enough when she recovered.

Where was the master ? She ran to the window and looked out, tremblingly expecting to behold a scene of dreadful strife—hordes of men rushing ferociously upon one another. The familiar landscape was

utterly deserted. Not a human being was to be seen. The solitude of it was terrible. It seemed that all life in it had been blotted out by the sea of monstrous noise which flooded it. She looked, without hope, for her master. She felt that he was lying, drowned as it were, somewhere under that invisible flood. He had disappeared. She would never see him again.

Loneliness closed upon her, held her in a cold grip. Isolated in a world smitten strange, she longed for companionship, for the warmth of another communing soul. She thought of her lover—out there, probably, in that tempest of noise—as a fisher-wife looks at the gale and thinks of her husband, with despair-

ful longing. Fear for him clutched her. Recklessly brave as he was, he would take undue risks. Then, paradoxically, she glowed with pride at his dauntlessness.

Suddenly she perceived horse-soldiers riding furiously down the little lane by which the trooper of yesterday had come. Her heart bounded. It seemed that these men were racing to her rescue. She cried out joyously, calling the news to the invalid. The woman on the bed did not stir. The soldiers, a long procession of them, galloped fast towards the farmhouse. They passed it, at the back, along the track which led into the fields. She grew oblivious to the incessant din, watching them. The stream of ap-



proaching cavalry had an end that was visible. Behind it, separated by a little space, came a team of horses harnessed to a vehicle. That too descended the lane in break-neck fashion. Men were riding the horses of the team. She saw their arms rise and fall, as, reaching the bottom of the valley, they flogged their beasts up the hither slope. More vehicles followed—a string of them—all at the same mad pace. The extreme urgency of their movement appalled her. The first vehicle drew near. It was a cannon. In a whirl of dust she had a glimpse of its long dun barrel, squat between the wheels, bisected by the bullet-proof shield. Its attendant wagon followed close. Then they passed one

after another, gun after gun. The last disappeared quickly behind the house. The lane was empty.

A minute later a sharp, violent explosion shook the windows. Another followed it, and another—six of them. It was the battery opening fire quite close. What were they shooting at? She strained her eyes to see, gazing across the unruffled landscape. Her ears, habituated to the general uproar, marked only the determined, regular reports of the battery expostulating with some invisible foe. Presently, while she watched, a heavy cloud of white smoke rose slowly behind a distant wood. She identified the place of its origin immediately. “Barker’s Farm! It’s on fire!” she cried.

The woman on the bed did not reply. The girl continued to gaze, fascinated, at the ascending column of smoke. Then suddenly the implication of it flashed on her. What had occurred at Barker's Farm might—probably would—occur here. A panic impulse to run out into the open away from this threatened building invaded her. She checked it with a glance at her unconscious mistress. She must stay, whatever happened, until—Her soul refused to admit the finality. The life-force in her summoned up the vision of the lover.

Movement down the lane which led to the farm attracted her attention. She forgot the battery, forgot Barker's Farm. Infantry were descending into the valley at the

double, an endless ribbon of them. She watched them with a flutter of the heart, a warm sensation in the breast. Tom Wetherby was a foot-soldier ! Her soul seemed to come into close communion with his as she thought of him. She saw him as he had visited her on furlough—jaunty, self-confident, brave. She was sure of his courage. She could see his smile, quietly undaunted, when discovery in their love-making was very near. A part of her swooned at the remembrance of his embrace, while she yet watched the oncoming infantry. Was he among them ? She would have given all she possessed for a glimpse at a shoulder-strap to identify the regiment. She focussed her gaze, ready

to observe when the column drew near enough. It disappointed her by turning into a meadow just below the farm, and skirting the buildings. With a spasm of fear, not for herself, she was again conscious of the terrific noise. "O God! protect him!" she prayed.

With acute interest she watched the stream of soldiers flowing into the field. Mysteriously she had arrived at a certitude of her lover's presence among them. To identify him in the constant procession of brown-clad men was impossible. The moving numbers baffled her gaze. There was no end to them. They came over the hill and down the little lane like a rivulet from an overflowing reservoir. About



the lower farm buildings they collected.

A line of them went forward along the valley meadow, and as they advanced the men drew farther and farther away from each other, until they were a long string of isolated brown figures dotted across the field. The clamour of the battle increased to an appalling intensity, but these men plodded steadily on. It seemed as if they were wading into the flood of noise. The girl watched them, her breath coming and going in little gasps through her slightly opened mouth. She knew instinctively that they were moving towards some fearful danger. On and on they went, and nothing happened. Acute apprehension of the catastrophe

came full circle in the girl to a nervous longing for the dread thing to occur—to occur quickly. The little figures went on, diminishing as they progressed. A second strung-out line commenced to follow them. Nothing happened. Was there after all no—? A fountain of black earth and smoke spurted up suddenly from the meadow. A faint crash drifted to her ears. Another and another fountain leaped from the soil, like geysers suddenly stirred to eruption. A haze of smoke spread itself across the field, towards which the second line unflinchingly advanced. The haze drifted off slowly. She could see the first line again. It was running forward. An attenuated cheer came to her, mingled with the crash

and roar of the guns. Hurrah ! Something leaped in her, inherited soldier blood surged to her head ; her anxiety was dissolved in excitement. Forward ! The second line was running now. A third line was following it. She, leaning out of the window, accompanied it in spirit ; her actual environment lost behind her. Tom—her Tom—was rushing into danger across that meadow, and she was unutterably proud of his intrepidity. It was dazzlingly magnificent. Never had she felt her love for him so strong. Yet she grudged not his exposure to the accumulating peril. Rather did her spirit urge him forward. Onward ! The black earth-fountains spouted here and there from the

meadow, and overhead small white puffs jumped—from nowhere—into the air. These puffs, once born, extended lazily towards one another, until they hung like a pall across the valley. Line after line went forward beneath it.

A faint crackle detached itself from the general uproar. She knew its meaning instinctively. The men who had advanced were opening fire. Her lover was at grips with that vague, terror-fraught abstraction, the enemy. Shivering with fears, anxieties, and excitement, she gazed intently into the now misty distance, while her soul found comfort in the certitude of his strength and courage. The idea of her lover dauntlessly affronting death out there thrilled

her, wrought to abnormality as she was by the fever of the surrounding battle, with a wave of splendid pride. The undertow of that wave was a feeling of her own unworthiness for such a hero. Now, dwarfed by the mighty environment in which her lover was risking his individuality, preservation of her own seemed a matter of little moment. Memory of her coldness to him filled her with remorse. If he could ever again condescend to notice her, she was his. In that moment she surrendered herself. She called his name in a strange warm glow, palpitating, yearning out to him where he stood, intent on being a hero. If he could only know ! Tom !

She felt her dress tugged sharply



from behind. She withdrew from the window, and turned to face a man in uniform. His face was grimed and channelled with sweat. He was unknown to her.

“What are you doing here?” shouted the officer.

She looked at him stupidly, trying to adjust herself to her actual surroundings. She had lost them utterly in her reverie.

He shook her arm.

“You must get out of here at once—at once. Do you hear?”

Alarm flooded her features.

“I can’t,” she said, and, not finding words to explain, pointed to the invalid.

“Ill? Can’t help it. She must be moved at once. This place’ll be

hell in another minute." He went to the window and blew his whistle shrilly. Then he turned to the bed. The girl, trembling all over, went with him. The officer seized the woman's shoulders and dropped them immediately.

"She's dead!"

The girl stared at the woman for a moment, and then at the officer. Death did not seem real. When?

"Get out of here!" he reiterated.

A tremendous concussion, quite close, shook the house, and a whiff of acrid smoke drifted in through the window. Half stunned, the girl uttered the cry of a panic-stricken animal, and rushed to the door. The stairs were choked with soldiers

coming up. She pushed through them recklessly, frantically.

The courtyard swarmed with men in khaki. They were unreal phantoms to her as she ran past them towards the gate. Ere she could reach it a vivid sheet of flame swallowed it; there was a fearful crash; a blast of smoke leaped at her; something felled her to the ground. Mad with terror she sprang up, shrieking, and dashed forward, blindly, over maimed bodies writhing in the smoke.

She was in the lane. How, she did not know. It was crowded, but she was conscious of no companionship. One idea alone was in her mind—concealment. One object alone was in her vision—the corn-

field in front of her. She rushed into it, breaking through the stalks. At last she flung herself upon the ground, like a hunted animal seeking earth. She lay there, panting, exhausted, but screened.

How long she remained thus she did not know. Perhaps she swooned. It was an incomputable period stretching far back. Existence seemed a dream. She was immobilized in an unearthly world, where vast flights of time, not to be measured by old standards, drifted over her. Noise was the atmosphere of this existence. A medley of frenzied sound enveloped her, without beginning, without ending, booming, crashing, splintering, cracking, ever louder, never diminishing. Her head ached hor-

ribly with it. Occasionally in the tumult she thought she discerned human shouts and screams. She pressed her fingers to her ears, and squeezed her eyelids down in an effort to escape from them. When she looked again it was to perceive the corn-stalks like a forest about her, and tiny insects going unperturbed about their business in its immensity.

The crackling sound which she had at first heard afar off down the valley was now close and greatly magnified. It revealed itself as an interminable succession of sharp, dry reports, caught up and swallowed every now and then by a swift swarm of them, blotted out at intervals by a heavy crash. Occasionally a riving shriek passed over her head. She



looked up and saw only the blue summer sky, pearly with the heat of the day.

Her violently shaken faculties settled gradually into equilibrium. With returning calm came an overpowering feeling of loneliness. She was isolated in a chaos terrible only to the ears and the imagination; the eyes saw nothing save motionless cornstalks on every side. This undisturbed seclusion was in uncanny contrast to the swollen roar of sound that encompassed her. The completeness of it frightened her. She began to long desperately for human companionship. The advance of the infantry along the valley, the last sight she had seen with unclouded vision, rehearsed itself obstinately in

her mind, linked to a thought of her lover. Tom ! If only he were here now, strong, brave, loving, to protect her ! An anxiety for him obsessed her. Her earlier mood of exultation had disappeared ; she imagined him lying shattered somewhere just beyond the limit of clear vision. Oh, that he were here ! She longed for him, unutterably, in a mood of heavy despair. She had no hope to escape, to resume her former quiet way of life—the possibility of so doing did not even occur to her—as well might a soul that has slipped into the abyss of Death contemplate a return to earth. She was plunged into this roaring chaos for eternity, terrestrial circumstance had fallen away from her. She was no longer

servant at Amwell's Farm ; she was a feminine soul merely, held yet to life by the all-powerful cosmic longing for the lover. In among the corn her body lay, huddled and motionless. The heat was stifling ; the air shook with the roar of massed artillery, with the shriek and crash of shells, with the ceaseless clatter of the rifles. It shook, but it lay heavy over the land, and the oppression of an accumulating storm wrought upon the girl with faintness and languor.

The hum of approaching voices startled her as though it came from another world. She sat up staring, endeavouring to fix the direction of its approach. It was a throng that drew near, moving through the corn.

Whence ? Whither ? In the turmoil of sounds that clashed and blended it was difficult to determine the bearings of that faint human murmur. Yes — yonder — surely !—there was motion in the corn. The battle was rolling down upon her. She flung herself again flat upon the earth, seeking to obliterate herself. A sharp crash split the air overhead. Simultaneously the hum of voices flared out of the murk of sound in a vast clamour of shouts and cheers. She had a flashed glimpse of an endless line of legs and trampling boots in swift motion. A heavy weight crashed down upon her, driving out her breath. The shouts swept forward like a wave, passed, and were lost in the smother of

noise. She lay numbed with terror. This must be Death.

The weight shifted, rolled off her, to an accompaniment of fluent curses. The girl's soul leaped joyfully at this vigorous blasphemy—she was still in a world where men swore in English! She rose quickly to her knees, and stared at a big moustachioed soldier who was endeavouring to regain his feet. Her eyes met his.

“Sorry, my lass,” said the soldier. He shouted, as of habit, to be heard in this word-swallowing din. “I tripped—I suppose—” He collapsed abruptly to the ground. “Oh—d—n!”

“What's the matter?” cried the girl.



“ I’m shot ! ”

He sat now, his face blanched a trifle, searching for his wound. The girl and he perceived it at the same moment—a trickle of blood running from the thigh. The soldier took a deep breath of relief.

“ That’s nothing ! — Funny how you don’t feel it when you’re hit.”

The girl crawled close, gazing, fascinated, at the runlet of blood.

“ Doesn’t it hurt ? ” They were both shouting at the top of their voices. It was automatic. They had forgotten the thunder of the battle.

“ It’s beginning to—a bit. That don’t worry me.” His face went stern. “ It’s keeping me out of this fight.”

“Are we winning?” the girl said anxiously.

“Ask me!—I don’t know. Got a handkerchief or anything? I must stop this. It’s pumping out fast.”

The girl looked despair for a moment. Then she tore off her blouse. The soldier was ripping up his trouser-leg with a knife. He glanced at her, accepting her sacrifice.

“Quick!” he said. “I’m getting faint.”

His leg lay in a pool of blood.

The girl rent her blouse in long strips.

“Round here—tight,” gasped the soldier, pointing to a place above the wound. His lips were blue.

She wound the strip round the limb.

“ Tighter ! ”

He sank back fainting.

With all her force she compressed the bandage. The spout of blood lessened, but continued. She must stop it. Genius whispered inspiration. She unbuckled his bayonet-sheath, and thrust it under the bandage. Then she twisted it—hard. The blood trickled, oozed, stopped. She bound the bayonet-sheath into place with another strip, flushed and triumphant. Fear—all the emotions induced by the surrounding battle ebbed from her mind. The intoxication of a successfully surmounted crisis possessed her.

The soldier still lay prone, motion-

less. Presently his eyelids fluttered, he moved, raised himself on an elbow like one awaking from sleep.

“ Water ! ” She could barely hear the word, but in an instant she was holding the flask to his mouth. It revived him. “ Steady ! ” he said. “ There isn’t too much of it.” The sight of water roused a consuming thirst in her also, but, bravely, she ignored it, and replaced the stopper. Then she slipped an arm about the wounded man, supporting him.

“ Would you rather lie down ? ” He was her patient ; on him was concentrated all the instinct to nurse which is latent in woman. Her voice was full of tenderness.

“ Not while you’re holding me, my angel. By Jove ! you’re a good

plucked 'un ! Fancy a girl in this hell ! ”

She smiled, having found her justification for being there.

He felt in a pocket, found a pipe, filled and lit it, and puffed comfortably. The clatter of rifle-fire sounded near and fierce. His face went dark and stern.

“ By G—d ! I wish I wasn't here with this hole in my leg though.”

“ It'll be all right,” she reassured him.

“ Yes — but don't you hear ? They're fighting there, and I'm knocked out—useless—oh, d—n ! I'd give my life to be in it to the end ! ” He stirred restlessly.

“ You mustn't move, or you'll have the bandage off.”



"Right. I'll be quiet, my lass. Can't help it. But you're a real pearl, you know. Straight you are! I suppose there's another chap—eh?"

"I'm engaged to a soldier," she said proudly.

"Thought as much. Just my luck," he replied gloomily. "Wish I had his. I'd give a lot for a kiss from those lovely lips of yours."

"If you talk like that, I shall leave you," she shouted back, severity in her tone. But she thrilled mysteriously.

"All right. Tell me about this young man of yours."

She was glad of the opportunity to call him to mind. The tenderness which was swelling in her

for this big helpless man frightened her.

“ He’s in the Stourshire regiment. He’s awfully handsome—and brave.”

“ Is he, though ! The Stourshire chaps are in front there somewhere, I think.”

“ Fighting ? ”

“ Sure ! ” He smiled at her alarm. “ All right. Don’t worry. He’ll take care of himself if he’s got you to come back to.”

“ Oh, you don’t know. He’s so brave—so reckless.”

“ And you love him ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! He’s splendid ! I don’t think he’s afraid of anything in the world. You can’t help loving a man like that, can you ? ” She appealed to him.

“ No, I suppose not. I’m pretty often afraid myself—but, by the Lord, I’d give anything to be out of this and in that scrap.” He stirred. “ If I could only crawl to the edge of this beastly field I could still shoot. Listen to ’em ! Listen !—Oh !—I’m off ! I can’t stand it ! ”

She held him in his place by main force, both arms round him, shouting : “ No ! no ! ”

He struggled. “ Listen to ’em ! Oh, d—n ! ” He poured out a stream of oaths that were swallowed up in a terrific and rapidly swelling clamour. The fierce rattle of rifle fire dominated all other sounds.

The girl went ashen with anxiety. “ O Tom ! Tom ! ” she cried. The

soldier sat still, glowering and moody.

Pandemonium rioted close at hand. A smell of burning filled the air.

There was a movement in the brake of cornstalks behind them. She sprang up to face a haggard soldier. His face was livid ; his eyes were staring blindly ; he was shouting unintelligible words ; he stumbled as he plunged through the corn.

“ Tom ! ”

He made as if to pass her—deaf, blind. She clutched at him.

“ Tom ! ”

Violently arrested, he turned and smote at her.

“ Lemme go ! ” he yelled. “ We’re licked, we’re licked ! Lemme go, I say ! They’re after us ! ”

“Tom! Tom!” She grasped him fiercely. “Don’t you know me?”

He glared at her and the wounded man.

“Lemme go, Milly!” He struck at her face. “They’re after me! We’re licked!”

She held him tenaciously.

“Coward!” she shouted. “Coward!” He hit her between the eyes. “Coward!”

He yelled horrible vituperation, and fought furiously to escape from her clutch. Finally he kicked her heavily. She sank to the ground. Tom Wetherby rushed away through the corn.

The girl burst into tears. She looked to see the wounded man



sighting his rifle after the fugitive. She struck it down.

“ No, no ! ” she cried.

“ The skunk ! The miserable little skunk ! Is that— ? ”

She nodded, weeping copiously. An exclamation from the wounded man made her look up. His movement had deranged the rough tourniquet. Blood was again flowing from the thigh. She hastened to tighten the bandage again. The soldier supported himself with an arm round her waist. The pressure of it was very pleasant to her. She lingered over the twisting of the bayonet-sheath. The soldier's mouth was very near her ear.

“ Milly ! ” she heard him say ;  
“ that's your name, isn't it ? ”

She nodded.

“Milly, you don’t care for him now, do you?”

She shook her head, tears blinding her as she used all her strength upon the bayonet-sheath.

“Milly! We may neither of us ever see to-morrow morning. What’s the use of waiting to say what I felt directly I saw you. Milly! You’re the girl for me! You’ve saved my life. There ain’t another woman in the world for me!”

She finished fastening the tourniquet desperately. She felt his hot breath upon her neck. She felt his strong big manhood very close.

“Milly!”

“Yes.” The word was inaudible in the fearful din which drowned

all sounds save the loudest and the closest.

“ Can you care for me ? There’s no time to haggle—we may be dead in half an hour. But dying won’t be so bad if you say yes. And if we get out—”

The tourniquet was finished. She broke down over him.

“ Oh, you’re so brave !—so brave ! ”

“ No, I’m not particularly brave, but I’m a steady sort, and if we ever get out of this you’ll find me a steady husband. Milly ! Say yes ! ” His arm held her very tight. “ Say yes ! ”

A shell exploded close to them with an appalling crash. She shrieked and flung herself blindly into his arms. He covered her mouth

with kisses. She responded madly, clutching at life. They held each other in a long embrace, fevered by the menace of destruction.

Presently they sat more calmly side by side, she with one arm supporting him, the other hand clasping his. He was telling her that after the war he was going to leave the army. He pictured a home for her. She listened, oblivious to the crash of battle all round. Here, in this vortex of Death, the loom of Life was busy with a new web.

“What do they call this place?” he asked, after a little silence wherein they had felt each other’s presence as a marvellous thing.

“Amwell’s Farm.” The answer was as remote from the throbbing

actuality of the moment as the question.

They looked at each other furtively. Something, greater than them, had taken hold of them. Their breath came in little gasps. Their nerves fluttered with the forewind of a mighty impulse. They trembled oddly, looked away.

“Milly !”

The rifle-fire swelled in savage bursts. Neither noticed it.

“I love you !”

She sank back in his arms, closing her eyes.

“Darling !—You !”

A wild cheer rang out, mastering the riot of sound. They heard it not. They embraced, body to body, mad with Life, that flamed up irre-



sistibly in the shadow of Death.  
They forgot the battle.

They hid in the great bosom of  
the fertile Mother, veiled by the tall  
corn.

## GLORY.

THE firing subsided with the declining sun. In the twilight the vast expanse of bare hills and valleys, that all day long had been the theatre of a mighty puppet-show, over which Life and Death had fought for the strings while a titanic orchestra went mad, lay sombre and desolate. On the first conclusion of the spectacle, lights out and orchestra hushed, it seemed that it was both silent and empty. Then the eye, no longer magnetized by some trembling, fateful issue, imagined rather than seen,

had leisure to rove through the twilight, and perceived that the stage was littered. The ear, recovering from the plethora of sound which had numbed it to all but the most violent percussions, awoke to the humbler chorus which, all day accompanying the grand chords and arpeggios of the battle, ceased not with the "Cease fire !" It was a mad chorus, worthy of the mad orchestra which had stirred it to utterance—a chorus agreed only in a fearful discord in the minor key ; a chorus of shrieks and wails, and a monotonous unwavering moan that played havoc with the nerves. At intervals the thundering hoofs of riderless, frightened horses, galloping aimlessly to and fro in squadrons across the fields,

made a sound like the roll of a lugubrious, slackened drum.

In the west was a thumb smear of red low down on the gray sky. Overhead the clouds massed themselves, indistinguishable in the murk. Rain began to fall steadily. In the centre of the picture, like a black river just discernible among the dark hues of the scene, regiment after regiment of Slav soldiers marched along the great road on the heels of the retreating Ottoman. In front of them a village flared to the sky, its flames blotted ever and anon by rolling smoke. The minaret of its tiny mosque, from which no muezzin had cried the hour of prayer that day, made one vivid last appearance to the world. From a dome-

roofed granary issued swarms of fiery bees.

On every side for miles and miles the littered fields lay under darkness and rain. From every side came that persistent, pitiful, unwavering chorus, out of harmony with the bland major progression of the universe. The ear, growing attentive to details, picked out one predominant plaint among the ceaseless inarticulate moans of suffering. It was the cry for water—water ! rising as steadily as the croak of frogs in a pool. In tens of thousands of human bodies lying wide scattered under the black sky burned a fire of anguish that the arrowing heavens were powerless to quench. In the gathering darkness moved tiny pin-



points of flame, dispersed and almost lost in the immensity, like the lights of fisher-boats at sea. They staggered with the burden of the catch.

Along the highway flowed the unceasing stream of soldiers. Regiment followed regiment until the men lost their individuality, became an endless shadow moving through the gloom, became a black river of mysterious force flowing from some great uncanny reservoir unsealed beyond the confines of this world. It flowed on and on, to expand into a lake only when the distant dam of Ottoman defence was reached. There it would accumulate, would dash with fire and thunder against the barrier. Now it was an almost silent stream, black with possibilities. In the first

flush of victory the atoms in that stream had cheered and sung. Darkness and fatigue had gradually depressed them. Each succeeding regiment was less noisy than its forerunner. At last the soldiers had passed with tight-set lips and bowed heads, splashing drearily through the mud, silent amid the lamentation of broken men.

Close to the road lay a wounded soldier, shot through the chest. Propped against the carcass of a dead horse, he had obtained some relief from the throatfuls of blood which threatened to choke him. He sat very still, his jaws tightly clenched, breathing with only a small portion of his lungs, in a tense effort to repress the cough which rose per-

sistently in his throat. He knew that it would inundate him with blood. About his grim mouth was a dark froth.

He sat very still, his limbs lax, his head heavy, his every faculty focussed on that urgent necessity for quiet breathing. He had remained in that position for hours. It was in the afternoon that he had been hit. Close before him was the little earth shelter from which he had risen, bayoneted rifle in his grasp, when the one among the myriad bullets in the air had slipped easily through his body. The little mound of earth, crossed by his dropped rifle, lay under his eyes, a monument of a life that was past. He stared at it without interest. A stealthily increasing

languor drugged him. His head nodded forward. He combated an overpowering desire for sleep in a terror lest he should lose control. Once or twice he jerked himself back to consciousness, with his mouth already running blood. He swooned a little, saw pictures of home life that seemed real, heard his mother's voice calling insistently : " Petro—Petro ! " but always in the foreground of the hallucination was that vital task of keeping down the cough. He marked not the passing regiments, heard not the plaintive chorus of the stricken field. He concentrated sombrely upon a fight for life.

He was awakened from his stupor by a blinding glare that beat upon

his eyes. He shielded them automatically with his hand, and perceived that the glare came from the powerful head-lamps of a motor car halted upon the road. Voices came from the intense blackness behind the glare. He could hear them distinctly. The speakers were invisible.

“ I felicitate your Royal Highness upon this glorious day,” said one of them, in the soldierly but respectful tones of a superior officer.

“ Thanks, general, thanks,” replied a younger voice. “ You share the glory with us.”

“ Your Royal Highness is pleased to be gracious. Love of the dynasty gave us strength and courage.”

Your Royal Highness ! The words



kindled the wounded soldier's intelligence. The Crown Prince ! He made an enormous effort, and saluted. He thrilled with emotions awaked by this proximity to his royal, almost god-like, masters.

The young voice spoke again, vibrant with enthusiasm.

" Oh, it's been magnificent, general, magnificent ! Glory ! Glory ! It's the finest thing in life ! " A boyish laugh of happiness rang out in the night. " Hallo ! there's a wounded man there. Why has he not been removed ? "

Another voice answered from the car in tones low and negligent, but distinctly audible :

" There are so many of them, your Royal Highness."

“ Our brave soldiers ! Have him picked up at once, general ! ”

There was a shrill note of a whistle, the rapid thud of a horse's hoofs, the voice of a man hailing one of the staggering lights. The wounded man understood, and raised himself in an access of supreme gratitude. With the passionate loyalty of the humble peasant who pays, unwittingly or enthusiastically, for all, he would have given almost life for a glance at the young Prince whom he had never seen, but on whose behalf he had marched, hungered, fought, and fallen.

“ Another such glorious day, general—and quickly ! Adieu ! ”

The car started, whizzed past, too quickly for sight of its occupants.

Petro uttered half a cheer, and fell forward, blood gushing from his mouth.

He was suspended in a black void. Floating horizontally, he swung slightly to and fro. This oscillation in infinite space made him feel dizzy. He shuddered with it, and then, paradoxically, wondered if he were dead—if this were eternity. The simple soul in him, schooled in the supercosmography of a popular religion, looked about for the familiar features of the eternal life, and, finding them not, was baffled. From an immeasurable distance came a sad, prolonged voice. The words it uttered were swollen into a large, open, inarticulate sound, which echoed and increased indefin-

itely through endless space, until it became almost unendurable. It was charged with an infinite fatigue ; the cry of a wearied people reverberating from sphere to sphere. It ceased, and although he had listened to it with painful intentness, he missed the exact moment of its ceasing. The black void peopled itself with a rush of phantoms, blurred but acting parts with furious intensity while they passed. He strove to fix one of them for a clear glimpse, but failed. The voice came again, enormously loud, strangely near. His mind surged up through the crowd of spectres which played over it, re-entered the terrestrial plane. The voice was still speaking. It was a man's voice grumbling at

his fatigue in a familiar tongue. The stretcher pitched as the bearers stumbled. The wounded man looked up to the starless night. He murmured, automatically, "Water !"

He was fully awake to his actual situation now. He knew that he was being borne as swiftly as possible towards doctors, nurses, towards attention, food and drink, and comfortable sleep. He was happy. A vague gratitude filled him, not especially towards the men who were carrying him through the night, but towards the great machine of mercy which picks up those crushed in the older machine of war, and, impersonally, scientifically, patches up the victims—brings them back again to life.



He was being borne through a sea of dolorous moan, far-stretching in the night, and, where they passed, this dead level of sound was excited into anguished clamour. It arose from before the feet, as the waters curl about a vessel's stern, and stretched into the distance behind them like a wake. It was a chorus of agonized appeals to stop—for the love of God to stop ! It was one cry for water, reiterated with a horrible diversity of accents and one fearful monotonous urgency of need. It was a medley of shrieks and screams and plaintive moans, of eager prayers and bitter curses, of despair howling in the night. It renewed itself ere it had time to fade. Their journey was a passage through hell. Behind them

figures rose painfully, and hobbled after them, like fiends making a lure of pity. The wounded man on the stretcher could not see them, but he could hear them, stumbling, falling, imploring assistance with whining voices. They stopped at last, cursing like disappointed djinns. Petro lay comfortable and happy. His egotism was caressed by the knowledge that he alone was picked from this waste of misery for attention. At times he was stabbed by a fear that he might be put down and abandoned in favour of some more urgent case. The steady onward plod of the bearers reassured him. He began to imagine the luxuries of hospital.

They were now upon a side-track,

and the steady beat of the marching regiments on the main road was more or less obscured by the shuffling tramp of numbers of men moving in the same direction as themselves. They fell into a procession of stretcher-bearers, advancing evenly, without delay or haste, through the streaming darkness. Their faces, glistening with rain, reflected the chance lights of the lanterns in strange expressions of grotesque solemnity. This solemnity was the product of a crushing fatigue. Emotion had no part in it. These wearied men had passed beyond sensibility. They were little more than automata, kept to their labours by discipline become a habit. Exhausted, faint, and aching, they plodded doggedly

on, keeping their pace in the procession, making no effort to better it. Mingled with them were wounded men who struggled along with the help of a rifle reversed and used as a crutch. There were others who progressed totteringly with their arms about the necks of a couple of comrades. At intervals in the procession heavy carts creaked and jolted along the rough track, acquiescing in the uniform pace of the traffic. From these carts came screams and howls as the lumbering vehicles lurched into a rut. Those who uttered no plaint on that woeful road advanced in absolute silence.

The way seemed endless to the wounded soldier on the stretcher. At last they halted. The hospital?

No—only a jam of traffic on the road before them. The rain beat down on him, chilling him to the bone. Now that they had stopped, the surrounding chorus of lamentation was more noticeable. The anxious sufferers fretted. They imagined, with experienced prescience, hospitals filled to overflowing. Petro shared this foreboding. He moaned his fear, hoping perhaps to stir some consolatory word from his bearers. They stood impassive, waiting, too wearied to reply to complaints that they had heard to satiety. If only there were room enough for him. The wounded man dwelt on this patch of thought, built alternate edifices of despair and hope upon it. Finally, when he had almost renounced existence



after a timeless wait, they moved on again.

They were in a village street. The place was furiously busy. There was not a house, not a hovel, that was not illuminated. The roadway was congested with traffic. At the doors of houses and hovels men clustered and argued angrily. In an agony of suspense the wounded man caught the dominant word of these altercations—"Full ! full !"

His bearers moved onward like machines, making evidently for some predecided destination.

At last they stopped before a heavy door, and hammered on it. They waited, without response. Again they announced themselves, with violent kicks against the massive

wood. This time they awoke reply. From the other side a voice screamed the dreaded words—"Full up!" The bearers argued. There was no other place to go to. The man must be taken in. The Crown Prince had sent him in for special care. It was an important case. The door opened a little.

"An officer?" queried the voice.

"No."

"Take him to the big hospital."

"We have been there before. They are crowded out."

"Try the Russians."

"Full."

"The Germans."

"Full."

The voice ran through a list of nationalities, and was countered

with the same response. The wounded man gathered, by a process of elimination, that this must be the English hospital. His bearers argued vehemently on his behalf, urging that he was a protégé of the Crown Prince. At last the door-keeper gave way.

"I don't think you'll find any room, but you can try."

They entered into a courtyard. On the ground figures lay in long rows. Only by pushing a couple apart did they find room for their burden. They deposited him, and marched off without a word.

A window and a doorway, brightly illumined, looked on to the courtyard, and suffused it with a faint light. Cloaked figures, moving and

bending, were dimly visible through the haze of rain. One came towards him. It was a woman. He had a view of a not unhandsome profile silhouetted against the light as she bent over him. He thought her wondrously beautiful. She wiped the blood from his face, and propped him in a more comfortable position, speaking the while in a foreign tongue. The words were meaningless to him, but the sympathy in her tone was plain. As she turned her head a little, he had a glimpse of her rain-wet face smiling at him. He smiled back. She spoke again in her strange language, and then stumblyly essayed a word or two in his own. "Victory ! glory !" she said, and smiled and nodded.

Then she splashed across the flooded courtyard to attend to another groaning sufferer. He saw her lifting a man whose face was a ghastly horror, and heard her repeat cheerfully, in her piquant foreign pronunciation, "Glory!"

His semi-recumbent position afforded him a view of the window and doorway. He saw clearly into the room. A large table stood underneath a naphtha flare, and about the table men were grouped. Every few minutes a couple of bearers picked up one of the prostrate forms in the courtyard, carried it into the room, and laid it on the table. He saw a man, dressed only in shirt and riding-breeches, bend over it, and pull or cut away the garments. He



saw a sponge placed quickly on the face of the patient, saw the man in shirt and breeches give a turn to his rolled-up sleeves ere he took a bright knife from a steaming vessel. He saw—he turned away his head in horror.

A minute or two later the patient was carried out, and another was borne in.

It rained persistently, viciously. The courtyard streamed with water. The immobile sufferers laid out upon the ground were soaked to the skin. They moaned impatiently. Petro felt a chill enter into his very bones. He could not keep his teeth from chattering. In the operating-room he saw the shirt-sleeved surgeon wipe the perspiration from his face.

He waited hours and hours for his turn to come, and never for a moment was the table under the naphtha flare unoccupied. At last, when he was numbed almost to unconsciousness, the bearers came to him and lifted him. He felt himself weak as a child in their powerful grasp. Immediately a terror of the knife surged over him. The coward in him strove to protest, to beg to be left alone, but he held his mouth locked.

In an incredibly short space of time he was lying on the table and blinking in the fierce light at the face of the surgeon bending over him. With a business-like swiftness the surgeon examined him, much as a tradesman examines a bale of goods, appraising

the damage with an utter lack of sentimentality. The wounded man gazed at the haggard, fatigue-drawn features of the expert, seeking, in an agony of suspense, to deduce his fate. The surgeon straightened himself, spoke a few rapid words in his foreign tongue to one of the attendants. The soldier was lifted off. He had escaped the knife ! He realized it in a rush of joy.

He was carried across the courtyard, and borne into a long room, lit also by a naphtha flare. Straw covered the floor, and on the straw lay the patients already attended to. A powerful odour of disinfectants assailed him. In the doubtful light a couple of nurses moved up and down, giving water or brandy or

morphia. They came to him and received instructions from the bearers. He was bandaged, given a draught. A knapsack was put beneath his head. He was left.

He rose to the surface of deep pools of sleep, and gazed about him with dazzled eyes. His environment was unchanged, save that the straw was more cumbered, the nurses busier. He looked round dreamily, as though drugged. His brain observed without comment. He saw a man borne past him with his face covered, and felt no curiosity as to the wound. The man struggled, and the cloth which veiled him dropped away, disclosing a face that was no face ; but Pedro experienced no thrill of horror. His nervous system

seemed already dead. He dozed off again, and awoke later with a parching thirst. The nurse that had succoured him in the courtyard brought him some hot soup. His eyes thanked her. She smiled, and repeated her magic formula. It fell on dull ears. He returned her smile only by a brave effort.

Throughout the long night he alternately dozed and waked. The dawn seemed a millennium still ages distant. The naphtha flare had been sizzling away for an eternity. The moans continued as they had continued through endless hours, without cessation. He did not especially notice them. Only occasionally when some agonized sufferer shrieked in the fever of his pain did he look



round. He forgot the incident as soon as the cries were stilled. Once he woke to see the surgeon, in his shirt and riding-breeches, stagger in like a drunken man and fling himself down on the straw. When he woke again the surgeon was gone.

At last, however, a gray light commenced to show through the window. The long room looked cold, unutterably desolate. Its rows of wounded appeared like corpses laid out for burial. It seemed strangely quiet, silent with the stupor which follows pain. A fearful odour overcame all disinfectants.

Presently the moans recommenced. Men recovering from chloroform talked in their sleep. Some evidently dreamed of home. Some

were again in the firing-line, or serving a battery.

Petro lay nerveless in the trough of an immense fatigue. His environment appeared strange, incongruous to him as he gazed on it with glassy eyes. He revolted from it as a man revolts in the morning from the evidences of a drunken revel. The roseate glamour which Life throws about her processes had fallen like a veil detached. It was no longer necessary for him. He had played his part. He saw now the hard outlines of actuality in a cold light. He contemplated them with a dull bitterness towards his fate. He felt that he had thrown away his life, all his potentialities for action, on a mirage. He reproached himself

for his folly. He had volunteered. The only son of a widow, he had not been summoned to the colours. He had joined them in a mad enthusiasm. He had sacrificed himself wantonly, to no purpose. The great ship of the State could be navigated without him. It went on just the same, now that he had fallen overboard. He might as well have stayed at home—and lived. The army would not miss him. His place in the ranks was closed up already. His regiment had marched on. His comrades had probably ejaculated his epitaph and forgotten him. Not there would he be missed. But in the village street at home he saw his mother pressing through the crowd about the bulletin board. He

could hear her, old and near-sighted as she was, begging her neighbours to read the news for her—could hear her prayers, continued while her request was being granted. He saw her standing on the threshold of their little house and gazing steadfastly, with hand horizontally above her eyes, into the distance. He had often seen her so when coming back late from some boyish expedition. She was waiting—waiting—for his return. In his vision of her she remained thus, immobile, her features tense with anxiety, gazing towards the distant mountains.

A man near him babbled of sheep lost on a hillside.

Suddenly a terrible thought shot into his mind. Who was to do

the ploughing in the spring? He looked into the future with a great fear.

The long room, with its couple of hundred sufferers—maimed, dismembered, perforated, gashed, blasted—resounded with groans and feverish cries. He heard them not. His mind beat against an appalling certitude of famine for those he loved. Tears, unknown to him, coursed down his cheeks.

There was a clank of swords and a sound of voices at the door. Every head that could turn did so in the direction of the noise. A tall, masterful man entered, followed by a group of officers. The King!

A wave of life rolled through the



desolate room. Men, swathed like mummies, raised themselves.

The royal visitor chatted amicably with the haggard surgeon. Then he cast a negligent eye over this collection of wrecked humanity.

“Children!” he cried in vibrant tones, “you have covered yourselves with glory!”

An uncanny hurrah! responded—a hurrah! that came from parched throats, willed by dying brains, but strangely, poignantly emotional. “Hurrah! long live the King!”

Petro did not finish the second hurrah. He had collapsed, a torrent of blood gushing from his lungs. . . . An old woman in a distant poverty-stricken village shuddered with an inexplicable qualm.

The King had stepped outside. He took a large chestful of fresh air. He spoke to one of the officers.

"Yes, general, I quite see your objection. But you must attack at all costs. The international situation imperatively demands it."

“ 'PLANES ! ”

THE reveillé sounded, and there was stir and movement in the mist-hung meadows where the brigade had passed the night. The groups of huddled, recumbent figures clustered round the sodden embers of the bivouac fires awoke, and the men sat up, yawned, rubbed their eyes as they came to themselves out of that heavy, drugged sleep which follows after a forced march, and rose to their feet. Acutely conscious of the hunger unsatisfied overnight, they discussed, pessimistically, the chances

of the supply train having arrived. Sergeants hurrying through the fog were stopped, questioned, and cursed as though they were responsible for the failure of the commissariat which their brief reply indicated. Grumbling, tightening their belts, and stamping chilled and stiffened limbs, the men wandered, guided by the fall of the land, down to the stream, and filled their water-bottles. A babel of voices rose through the blanket of mist. Bad-tempered men, their faces white and drawn with fatigue, jostled against each other at the little stream, and swore at those who fouled it with muddy boots. Altercations arose, the pointless, endless bickerings of tired and hungry men. Suddenly a voice cried,—

“ By G—d ! They're at it ! I heard a gun ! ”

“ No—rot ! ”—“ Yes, there was ! He's right ! ” A chorus of such affirmations and denials arose.

“ Shut up, you fools ! ” cried the first speaker. “ Listen ! ”

A hush came over the group of men as they stood with heads cocked on one side and faculties at strain. A dull boom, not very loud, but seeming none the less to shake the air, was heard distinctly. It was repeated almost before the sound had rumbled into silence.

The chorus of voices broke out afresh.

“ He's right ! They're at it !—How far away ?—Eight miles !—Ten !—Five ! ”



The first speaker, who, as the discoverer of the phenomenon, seemed to consider himself as sole patentee of all knowledge to be derived from it, spoke authoritatively.

“Not more than seven and a half,” he said. “Come on, boys; we’d better be getting back. They’ll be wanting us presently.”

The news that a part of the army was fighting already a few miles away spread itself instantaneously over the meadows. Knots of men discussed the situation excitedly. Many — not officers only — spread maps upon the soaked grass, and, kneeling round them, pointed with finger or pipe-stem to the positions believed to be in hostile occupation — positions hotly contested on the mo-

ment by their comrades—and traced the line of march they considered probable. The sun, pale and watery, broke through the mist, and looked down upon the busy meadows.

A motor car throbbed, hooting, along the narrow lane, and stopped at a gate leading into the fields. The brigadier disengaged himself from a group of his staff and strode towards it. For a few minutes he stood in talk with a gray-moustached soldier in the car. A map was unfolded and spread out. The brigadier bent over it, following the gray-moustached officer's finger. Then, with a nod, he stepped back and saluted. The car, after a warning hoot, shot forward along the lane.

The brigadier went back towards

his staff, watched, with excited interest, by every man near enough to perceive him through the mist.

A minute afterwards the bugle sang out the "Fall in." It was repeated, in quick and overlapping succession, like the various chimes of a country town, by bugle after bugle all over the meadows.

The chaotic mass of men collected, jostled, straightened itself into long lines, and stood still. There was a hurrying to and fro of officers. The captains stood, statuesque in the mist, in front of their companies.

Pursuant to the commands barked out successively, the lines thickened and turned into columns of fours, and, battalion after battalion, the

brigade regiments marched across the fields and wheeled into the lane.

The regular beat of thousands of boots upon the earth as the brigade lengthened along the lane swelled into a heavy, endless sound that deadened the senses. Sharp-eared among the men contended as to whether the distant guns were still firing or no, but certainty was impossible in the tramp of the marching regiments.

Presently there was no doubt about the gun-fire. A succession of heavy reports, too distinct for thunder, smote the ears of the men. They looked, with an outburst of excited talk, eagerly at the sky before them. No sign of strife stained the pale blue of the heaven, but the sound

continued—was never to cease, indeed, all that day. Minute by minute it swelled into a heavier, louder roar, that surged in the ears like a wave at each more marked concussion. Mounted officers rode along the column, hastening its pace.

The tired men, now getting into the swing of motion, had quickened it involuntarily at the sound; but greater efforts were required. “Step it out now!”—“Forward!”—“No straggling!”—“Forward!” rose at irregular intervals above the incessant tramp of the marching column. The men, shifting their rifles now to the shoulder, now to the trail, now slinging them across their backs in an effort to get some relief for the muscles tired out on the previous



day, set their teeth and stepped sturdily forward. With the excitement of the battle fever, induced by that distant artillery fire, beginning to surge in their blood, they were conscious of their unsatisfied hunger only as a vague ache. Up hill and down the column wound, twisting like a long, light-brown snake now to the right, now to the left between the narrow hedges ; passing farm-houses ; crossing streams ; rousing little villages, where a few inhabitants had remained, into wakefulness ; waking only echoes in others that were deserted, their windows boarded up ; pressing always towards that persistent, swelling thunder of artillery, hastening to join the army that for the past week

had been steadily forcing the enemy back.

There was an outburst of wild cries from the rear. The officers looked back. A staff-officer cantered along the column, shouting commands. The men were hurriedly pressed against the hedge. A battery of guns tore along the lane at a gallop, thundering past them as an express hurtles past a side-tracked train. Springing from stone or rut the guns rushed through, the shouting drivers lashing their horses like jockeys in a race, the swaying gunners clinging tightly to their limber-seats and yelling jeers and witticisms at the huddled infantry. They were happily out of earshot of the responses.

“ Getting close now,” was the opinion of the brigade. “ They wouldn’t go far at that pace.” The unceasing thunder of the invisible artillery, now deafeningly intense, gave probability to the surmise.

The last wagon of the battery passed, and the infantry opened out into the lane again and resumed its march. The fancied nearness to the fray acted like a tonic on the men. Some one struck up a popular song, other voices joined in ; and in a few moments, to a stirring chorus from thousands of throats, the column had quickened step. The thunderous menace of the battle in front of them filled the air, seeming to shake the blue sky, but the chorus held on, rhythmic to the tramp.

“Hallo! Look! There’s an aeroplane!” The speaker was not alone to perceive it. Every man in the brigade had looked up to see the machine shoot over the wooded hills in front of them. The singing ceased.

“It’s ours!—No, it isn’t!—Yes! I know the pattern!—No!”

“It’s the enemy’s,” observed a tall man in the ranks mildly. “Ours have bigger planes.”

The conviction that the machine was hostile spread. Men speculated anxiously as to whether it was a bomb-dropper or merely a scout.

“It can do what it likes with us, that’s certain. D—d things!” said the mild man.

There was a general sigh of relief

when the machine, after a circle overhead, whirred back harmlessly out of sight.

“ They know we’re coming, anyway,” said the mild man’s right-hand file gloomily. Then, with a rising tone of excitement, he added, “ Look ! they’re firing at it ! ”

They saw the aeroplane lift into sight again over the trees, rising rapidly. Puff-balls of smoke appeared in the air around, below it. Suddenly the machine stopped, pitched, dropped earthward in a dreadful headlong rush.

“ Got him ! ” cried some one exultantly. “ He flew too low that time.”

“ Halt ! ” The yellow-brown serpent contracted its length a little and stopped.



“What’s up?” queried the men.  
“Surely we’re in time after all.”

The brigade had halted in a hollow of the wooded, enclosed country. On every side the view was bounded by tree-clad hills. Somewhere just over them, just out of sight, the stern match was being played. Along a line of ten miles or more, among those hills and woods, Life, wrought to fever-pitch, was exposing itself to Death. The thunder of a multitude of guns merged, mounting, into one terrible open roar that shook the earth and deafened the listening ears. Yet, save for the episode of the aeroplane, no sign of the strife had yet been visible.

After a few minutes of impatient waiting, the brigade moved on again,

climbed the next hill, and descended the next valley — again, “ Halt ! ”

The head of the column had stopped just at the foot of the descent, tailing out its long body above it, behind it, over the last hill. Close now, evidently, to the clamorous strife and afforded a view ahead, the men looked eagerly for visible signs of battle. In a water-meadow to the left of the road a cluster of white tents, splashed largely with red crosses, stood in the shade of a few trees. It was a field hospital. In front was one of the hills to which the last few miles had accustomed them—a steep acclivity, tree covered, gashed with the ascending road, shutting out the view. As they looked

they saw an endless procession of ambulance carts trotting over the brow of that hill and descending, while a counter-procession of similar carts climbed back toilsomely up the slope. That was all. No other men were visible ; and in that ear-destroying, open, expanding, continuous roar those carts seemed to travel in an uncanny silence. Rapidly, ceaselessly, they came over the brow of the hill, bearing wrecked and broken men from that sea of sound which to the imagination lay just beyond it, out of sight. In the field hospital the surgeons worked like automata set to full speed. A tent-flap rising for a moment in a puff of wind revealed a sight that made the men in the leading files

of the column look the other way hurriedly.

The brigade fretted, grumbled, cursed at its inaction. Across the low-lying meadows to the right a regiment of cavalry moved slowly—idly, it seemed. Nobody seemed to be doing anything. In the fever induced by the vast roar that seemed ever to be mounting to a pitch from which it must decline but yet never diminished, the men were guilty of blasphemy against the commander-in-chief.

“ What’s he playing at, anyway ? Why doesn’t he send us in ? ”

The cavalry regiment continued its quiet stroll across the meadow. The procession of ambulances streamed steadily down the

hill. The roar of the invisible battle abated not at all. But still the brigade moved not.

Suddenly a mounted officer appeared galloping down the hill. He waved his hand wildly. Scarcely hearing the sharp monosyllabic orders, the brigade surged forward. Despite the restraining voices of the officers, it broke for a minute or two into the "Double," so eager were the men to rush into the fight. At last ! And in the excitement of the crisis men went oddly pale who had no consciousness of fear.

"Steady, men, steady ! You'll want your breath presently !" cried the officers ; and the brigade, against the sharp rise of the hill, fell into a slower step, swifter none the less



than its pace during the march. The ambulances, stopped, were pressed against the hedges on either hand, and the column, heedless of the menace they symbolized, moved rapidly up between them, drawn at last into the battle-vortex.

At the top the road bent sharply to the right, and kept to the ridge. A knot of mounted officers awaited the brigade at the bend. The brigadier cantered quickly up to them, and exchanged eager talk. As the leading files reached the summit, six heavy reports, in quick but regular succession, broke from a battery extended along the road to the right. Beyond it, for ten miles in that direction, scores of other batteries and hundreds of thousands of rifles

were thundering, crashing, crackling against each other in a vast concerto of noise that, when the brain, now accustomed and half-oblivious to it, reperceived it, seemed to check the pulse. The brigade had arrived on the extreme left flank of the army at the moment when its forward movement was checked, forced back.

Quickly the battalions were distributed to positions along the ridge. Companies became semi-independent units. One broke into a farmhouse standing at the bend of the road, and hurriedly put it into a state of defence. Another lined the garden wall. A third occupied the orchard. One, supplied—who knew whence?—with picks and shovels, dug in

all haste a shelter-trench across a potato field. The work was almost frantically performed, yet still the officers cried for speed. The battery on the right was firing rapidly, but the toiling men had no leisure to raise their eyes towards its target. They had a confused sense of yet more troops arriving, behind and on either side of them, and an intuitive knowledge of imminent danger. They dug on, blindly almost, delving for shelter against the coming storm. As yet, no shots fell near them.

At last, the trench finished, the water-cans filled, the cartridge-boxes placed at intervals, the line manned, they could look about them. The shelter-trench ran a little below the crest of a gradual slope down to a

broad green valley. At the farther side of the valley dense woods descended. Below them was a farmhouse, to which a spur of the ridge led a rough track.

The officers gave the range to the edge of the woods. "Nine hundred yards!" Men adjusted their sights in anticipation.

From those woods a horde of light-brown infantry was issuing. Battalion, company formations lost, a brigade in rout, the infantry emerged endlessly in swarms from the trees. They ran—in fear, it seemed to the men in the shelter-trench up above, of an imaginary foe. Officers rushed about the mass with brandished swords, like herdsmen rounding up cattle, and collected them into some

order in the broad valley meadows. At the same moment a company went at the double down the cart-track from the ridge to the outlying farmhouse. A few moments later the men watching above saw a little cloud of mortar-dust rise round the buildings. The company was knocking out loopholes.

The stream of infantry from the woods stopped. The last men, who had kept a loose formation, turned at every minute, and, dropping on the knee or prone, fired at the shelter they had just quitted. Then they ran on, to turn and fire again a few yards farther on. A quiet, leisurely officer directed them. No enemy was visible or specially audible, but every now and then one of this



rearguard threw up his arms or fell in a heap. The routed brigade, now in some measure reformed, was marching up to the ridge. Presently the rearguard followed it, leaving the valley empty, save for the stretched-out bodies here and there.

There was a pause. To the excited, watching men in the shelter-trench it was like the end of an act at a play. Then suddenly the batteries behind them—more than one now—roared, gun after gun in quick succession. The men in the trenches had not noticed the temporary cessation of their fire. As they spoke again little curls of smoke began to rise slowly here and there above the tree tops, dark holes suddenly appeared in the blanket of foliage, a

faint flash showed occasionally in the shadows. The waiting soldiers settled themselves in their trench, their fingers on the triggers, itching to fire. Still no enemy showed himself. The woods might have been deserted—a practice-target merely for the persistent guns.

“ Look ! ” High above the woods an aeroplane rushed at full speed towards them. Smoke-puffs burst out of the air below around it. Untouched, the machine came on, at an elevation too great for the angry guns. A murmur of impotent wrath ran along the trenches, a crackle of rifle-fire broke out. Superbly unscathed, the aeroplane rose above the ridge, turned, followed it ; then, rising yet higher, fled back to its lair

behind the woods. The harmless smoke-puffs followed it until it dropped out of sight.

Immediately almost the attention of the men on the ridge was attracted to the outlying farmhouse. It looked like a box of crackers going off by itself. A quick series of little explosions dotted the fields around it ; sharp little puffs of smoke broke out on the roof, against the walls, round the fences, in the courtyard. The sound of these explosions was distinctly audible above the ear-crushing roar that all this time had never ceased. The explosions about the farmhouse multiplied. It looked like a little volcano in active eruption. The chimney-stack disappeared suddenly, the roof fell in

great holes, the walls crumbled—it was as though invisible hands were tearing it down. Smoke and flame arose. The explosions, everywhere at once now, continued. There was no sign of the men that garrisoned it.

“ Wonder where those guns are ? ” queried some one in the trench above. “ They’ll be having a go at us in a minute.”

He had scarcely spoken when there was a long-drawn sharp wail, rising to a screech, in the air above. Immediately a succession of splitting crashes followed, somewhere behind them. Out of that noise the wail came again. A row of little white smoke clouds sprang out of the blue air in front of them with a deafening run of reports, followed on the in-

stant by the high-pitched drone of shrapnel bullets. The drone had not died away before another series broke over the trench. Henceforth there was no cessation. It was a tornado that swept over the position. The stricken infantry cowered in their shelters, not daring to raise their heads.

The storm was at its height when the whistles of the officers shrilled out. Below them, in the valley, the enemy was debouching in a cloud of skirmishers from the wood. Heedless of the rain of shells the infantry made ready for him, those panic-stricken in the trenches kicked meanwhile into activity. Down below, from the blazing ruins of the farmhouse, came a fusillade, faint in the



roar that seemed to centre now upon the ridge. The men in the trenches took aim, and fired in a crackling roll. The crowd of dark-uniformed soldiers below were coming on in a rush, disdaining to seek cover, when they met the sheet of bullets. Numbers of them seemed to trip over an unseen obstacle. Others dropped as though felled by a blow on the head. Some sprang and twisted as if stung ere they sank down. Above, the men in the trenches, yelling, laughing, cursing, praying, singing in the battle fever, loosed bullets on them in a heavy shower. The batteries on the ridge beat them down with shrapnel till the crowded meadow looked like a rye-field in a hail squall.

Panic seized the dark soldiery.

Men rushed hither and thither aimlessly, to leap into the air for a final fall headlong, or to be flung down with a dozen comrades under the smoke-puff which marked a bursting shell. Some threw themselves behind a scrap of cover and fired rapidly, vainly, at the terrible heights whence the flood of death poured on them. Others rushed almost alone towards them, until they collapsed suddenly, dramatically. The most hesitated, turned, looked from side to side, and then ran back, a chaotic rabble, to the shelter of the woods.

The attack had failed, but the hail of shells still beat upon the ridge, decimating the men in the trenches as they showed themselves to fire.

Nevertheless, with the meadows below again clear, there was a lull for the defenders. They lay down again upon a litter of empty brass cartridge-cases, and submitted as patiently as they could to the shrapnel that crashed and droned above their heads. The weariness of the long marches had passed away, but hunger was an acute pain, and thirst a torture to parched throats and dry, swollen lips. The bottles and water-cans in the trenches were soon emptied. Groups, wild-eyed and grim, cast lots ; and here and there men, hung all about with water-bottles, sprang out of the trench and raced, bending low, across the shell-swept field. Some fell or disappeared in a flash of flame. The most reached the

farm buildings, and clustered about the well.

Down below in the valley a dozen men—all that remained of the company—were running back from the ruins of the other farmhouse.

The batteries behind—still further reinforced, it seemed—ceased not with their fire. The ground shook with their reports. Again smoke was curling up above the tree-tops of the woods.

Suddenly the whistles shrilled out anew.

Dark figures were emerging cautiously, in little groups, from the wood. Taught by experience, they now availed themselves of every scrap of cover. More followed them, and yet more—an endless number. Again

the crackling roll ran along the trenches. Again the shrapnel burst in quick puffs over their heads. They seemed to mind it as little as the grim defenders on the ridge heeded the shrapnel which still assailed them. Yard by yard, in little rushes, they pressed steadily forward, firing every time they dropped into cover. The ruined farmhouse was silent now, tenanted only by dead or helpless men. A crowd of dark soldiers made a rush for it, established themselves there. Again the sporadic explosions dotted the broken walls.

Forward, steadily forward, pressed the dark throng. The valley was filled with figures running towards the ridge, throwing themselves down,



springing up again, spurting onward. Rifle bullets sang an ever louder song over the heads of the defenders in the trenches. The shrapnel burst viciously over the ridge. The quick reports of the guns merged into one incessant deafening roar. The roll of rifle-volleys went on endlessly.

Still the dark mass pressed onward, losing heavily, but creeping gradually nearer to the ridge which was its goal. The leading figures were already firing from the slope on the hither side of the ruined farmhouse.

The defenders nerved themselves for a supreme effort. The roll of the rifles swelled into ever louder volume. Fresh battalions came up and flung themselves down in the open along

the ridge, firing swiftly. The batteries swept the slope with shells. The forward movement of the dark mass stopped. Confusion spread among it. It was the crisis of the attack.

Suddenly there was a cry along the ridge.

“ Look ! Oh, my Gawd ! Look ! ”

Six aeroplanes, one behind the flanks of the other, like a flight of birds, were rushing towards them. High above the shells they came, and, as they approached, the shrapnel ceased to beat upon the ridge. The respite was for a moment only. Every man upon the ridge knew it, and in panic desperation they turned their rifles up to the machines and fired, emptying their magazines reck-

lessly. In vain the officers strove to stop them, pointing to the men below now surging up scathless to the attack. They fired wildly into the air against the onward-rushing menace, forgetting all else save the urgent necessity of crippling them ere they floated overhead.

The leading machine reached the ridge, slackened, and turned along it. A stream of small objects fell from her as she drove slowly onward. A succession of heavy explosions, a series of vivid eruptions, burst out along the crowded ridge. The ammunition wagons of a battery went into the air in a sheet of flame.

Her consort reached the ridge, turned, and did likewise. The rear machines imitated them as they came

up. One followed the line of the shelter-trench across the potato field. It seemed to the men in it that the earth exploded under their feet. Everything seemed swaying, rocking, in flame and paralysing sound. With a shriek they fled wildly—anywhere, amid an inferno of explosions. Behind them broke out a roar of cheers, a roll of murderous rifle-fire. The dark uniforms swarmed into the position, shooting down the fugitives, pursuing them with levelled bayonets at their backs.

A battery, caught in the midst of a struggle with maddened, plunging horses, was overrun. Another tore wildly through the crowd, knocking over all in its way. A mass of frenzied infantry, all order gone, all

discipline lost, raced, fought, jostled, stumbled, in a mad rush for safety. In a torrent they poured, foot and guns, into the narrow road behind the ridge, trampling underfoot those who fell, shooting down those who tried to stay them, staring with wild eyes, yet blind with terror. Behind them rolled the rifle volleys of their foes.

Overhead the aeroplanes, their work done, sailed slowly back.



## WOUNDED.

“**T**HERE ain’t nothin’ like artillery for making ’em jump !”

The speaker was an unwashed, hungry-looking private, sprawled full-length on a turnip field. He lay behind a little heap of earth, in the shallow depression whence his shelter had been scraped. He was in the skirmish-line of a battalion in support of a battery, and his interest was focussed on a wood some five hundred yards below and in advance of him. That wood had been stealthily occupied by the enemy,

and the battery, becoming aware of such an undesirable neighbour, had turned on it with fury. The trembling air was punched by the rapid reports of the guns, and torn with the rush of shells. A battery to the right, having nothing better to do, lent a friendly hand, and took the wood in flank. From two sides the shells streamed on to the wood, and hurtled in among the trees. For some minutes their effect could only be guessed at from red flashes among the shadows, and a film of smoke which rose through the foliage and formed a steadily thickening canopy. The imaginations of the men in the battery played hopefully with a picture of hell down there in the thicket, and they strove, cheerfully and ener-

getically, to make it a reality. The skirmish-line was a string of enthusiastic spectators, sharing the same vision. They watched eagerly for some sign which should confirm their experienced perspicuity.

It came. From the left-hand edge of the wood sprang a group of men in a desperate hurry. Once in the open they turned their backs to the battery, and ran as though in a race. The skirmish-line greeted them with a joyous shout and a long crackle of rifles. One after the other the running men pitched and fell. Then the hunt commenced. Like rabbits bolting from a corn-patch threatened by the reaper, men dashed in swift succession from the wood. As each appeared a shout went up from the

skirmish-line, and a burst of bullets came from the levelled rifles. Sooner or later the panic-stricken victim tumbled. His fall was the occasion of delirious laughter. Another fugitive quickly took his place in this race with death, preferable to the inferno of reeling trees, falling branches, and blazing undergrowth behind him. For the skirmish-line the game grew exciting. One had scarcely time to bring down his man ere another was scuttling out of range across the field. Fugitives swarmed out of the thicket. The marksmen desisted from their shouts of laughter, and took the business with so much of seriousness as only to chuckle as they aimed and fired. Their targets multiplied faster than they could be

disposed of. The field was dark with running figures. Then the battery turned a couple of guns to assist the skirmish-line in the battue. Puffs of smoke sprang violently into existence over the escaping game, and underneath each puff of smoke a group of men was flung to earth.

The skirmisher, who had before expressed his admiration of the artillery, stopped to let his rifle cool a little, and gave himself up to unworried enjoyment of the scene. He found it intensely amusing. The desperate haste of those little figures, their curious attitudes as they ran, their absurd endeavours to avoid the inevitable catastrophe, were to him indescribably funny. He picked out first one and then another of them,



and watched it scamper, twist, turn, and dart on again. When finally it lurched or jumped or merely dropped, he laughed like one out of himself. The vicious splashes of shrapnel that arrested the flight of half a dozen or more at a time filled him with a savage delight. One figure that he watched, running fast with arms to side and head thrown back as in a hundred yards' sprint, was overtaken by a shell that pitched short and swooped down in front of him. The skirmisher saw him jerked into the air, black against a sheet of flame, arms flying asunder from the body. He shouted with laughter.

“ Good old artillery ! ” he cried.  
“ Give ’em hell !—Hallo ! What’s that ? ”

The battery behind him suddenly ceased firing. He turned to look for the reason, and perceived the gun-squads working frantically to turn their weapons in a new direction. Officers were shouting and gesticulating. Some dire menace rendered haste imperative. He half rose in a sudden anxiety. He saw the Number Threes swiftly laying the guns—the air was a blur of flame——

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He was staring up at a blue sky. Why was he staring at it? Blue sky—memory stirred faintly in him. He seemed to have been staring at a blue sky for eternity. He must look at something else. He could not. He could only close his eyes. When he opened them again, a little more

of him was awake. He was lying on his back, therefore he stared at the sky. His consciousness mastered that, extended itself. He was lying on the ground in a fire! He was being burnt, burnt horribly. His consciousness was now of a searing anguish. He forgot the blue sky. Pain filled him, intolerable pain—and then terror. He was being burnt alive where he lay. He must get up—get up—get up— He swooned.

Pain dominated his consciousness at its first return. He was being burnt—not all of him—his right arm only. His right arm lay in a fire. He must move it. He could not. Terror swept over him. Perspiration broke out on his body. He felt the chill of it in curious con-

trast to the anguish of his arm. His mind swam in pain. Consciousness spread in him, discovered a new torture. Thirst consumed him. "Water! water!" He could not hear his own words, but he knew that he had cried out. Why could he not hear? His mind rose with a leap to perceive the reason. The air was shaking with the thunderous sound-swallowing blast of battle. A germ of thought opened in him. They were still fighting then! On this germ of thought his mind concentrated, fed it with perceptions. He listened. The battery above him was in hot action. By the noise another had come to its support. He listened for a timeless period, filled with awful clamour. Then

he forgot the battery in a surge of pain. His arm ! Water ! water !

He must move away from that fire. He willed the action, and lay motionless. He could not move. He lay like one in a waking trance, terrified to screaming point. He heard his voice then, and the sound, overwhelmed though it was by the noise of the battle, was some relief to him. The scream of terror changed instantly to a howl of anguish. His right arm was being consumed utterly ; he could imagine flames licking it. He could not see it. He could not move his head. He could not move a limb. Yes ! He could move his left arm. Feebly the fingers of that hand felt for his water-bottle, and found it not. Water ! The



fierce necessity for liquid forced him to concentrate all his powers on the problem of obtaining it. His water-bottle!—it must be on his right side somewhere. His right hand must feel for it, must be withdrawn from that devouring flame. His right hand—on that he focussed himself. His mind shrank back from the attempt while his mouth uttered a shriek—the fingers of his right hand were suffering excruciating torture. For an agonized second he was made aware of their sensitiveness to pain—then he swooned again.

Æons passed over him. He emerged slowly, imperceptibly, into life. The batteries above him were still firing rapidly. They had been firing for hours and hours. He

wondered, dully, at their ability to keep up such a violent cannonade for so long a period. His mind had recuperated mysteriously during his swoon. It was capable of vague ratiocination. It began even to imagine the difficulties of ammunition supply for those batteries, when a wave of pain from his right arm routed thought in him. One idea alone stuck in his mind—the lapse of time since he had been wounded. He knew now clearly that he was wounded ; before, he had realized only that he existed, and was in pain. Now he saw himself distinctly as a wounded soldier lying in a turnip field. Another idea linked itself to the first—wounded—ambulance—why was he not picked up ?

He ought not to have been left there all day under fire. Anger against the ambulance-men surged up in him—cowards ! Why did they not pick him up ? Cowards ! He snarled in bitter wrath. The emotion exhausted him, and he relapsed to consciousness of his agony. If he could only get his arm out of that fire ! Not for a moment did he doubt the reality of the flames at his side. The sensation of them was too vivid. It was, above all, his fingers that caused him anguish. They seemed to be tightly clenched over a live coal, and he was powerless to open them. It was strange that his arm was not yet utterly consumed. He wondered feebly how long it took to char living flesh

and bone. He imagined the limb already black.

Hell ! This was what it was to be wounded. Hell ! He shrieked in fierce paroxysms of pain. From finger-tip to shoulder his arm was glowing agony. Pain came in waves. In a trough of those waves he wallowed in self-pity. Why should he have been chosen for such anguish ? He had done nothing to deserve it—only his duty ! Oh, God ! why was he suffering so ? How could men inflict such agony on their fellow-creatures ? As far as he was concerned, it was unprovoked brutality. He swooned into a dream of the figures streaming out of the infernal wood into the hail of shrapnel—amid maniac laughter.

Hours and hours passed. Night must be approaching. He lay panic-stricken at the thought of the hours of darkness. He saw his chances of being picked up diminishing. He knew from experience how easy it was to overlook wounded men at night. One found them in the morning dead, or perhaps mad. These thoughts tortured him, struggling with the fierce pain of his arm for supremacy in the torment both were agreed in inflicting upon his helplessness. Physical pain won upon the whole, but the thoughts returned persistently whenever they could find a clear space in his brain. Overlooked! Or perhaps he had been examined already, hours ago, and left for dead? He was not dead.



He shrieked out loudly to prove it. The thunder of the batteries swallowed his voice. His arm ! his arm ! Oh, God ! Water ! water ! His mind raved ; scream after scream came from his mouth. He lay motionless.

What was that ? Silence ! The batteries had ceased fire. They would be moving in an instant. He heard voices. They were limbering up. In another moment they would be galloping off. Over him ? His fears prophesied the horror. Terror paralysed him. He tried to scream, but no sound came. They would dash over him, a rain of hoofs, whirling wheels, mangling him, crushing him. He had seen men crushed. He strove desperately to shriek. At

last the sound issued from his throat, piercingly loud, startling him. The voices approached. He heard words.

“Hurry up, Bill, with that stretcher!”

At last! He was going to be picked up. His arm was going to be taken out of the fire which had been consuming it for hours and hours. Perhaps even now it was not too late to save the limb. Hope sprang up in him, mingled with anger at the long delay of the ambulance men, and a fear that even at this last moment he might be overlooked. He screamed again to let them know his presence.

“All right—all right, old fellow!”  
A big face was looking down on

his. "Easy now, Bill ; careful does it !"

"Quickly, quickly !" he cried.  
"Take it out of the fire !"

"What's 'e talking about ?" said another voice. "There ain't no fire."

Dazed by this unexpected reply, he felt himself lifted up, shoulders and feet, and then placed on a stretcher. The stretcher was raised from the ground. He was in motion. Querulous anger against the dilatory ambulance-men still filled him. He voiced it.

"Eh ?" came the response from the man behind his head. "What's that ? 'Ark at 'im, Bill ! 'E wants to know why we left 'im all those hours. Why, mate, you've only just

got knocked over. 'Asn't 'e, Bill ? You ain't been there more than two or three minutes, mate."

They passed behind the battery. The wounded man heard the orders of officers fixing a fresh range. Two of them were conversing.

"That was a hot five minutes," said one.

The wounded man, bewildered, found a fresh source of complaint.

"My arm ! You're hurting my arm !" he cried.

"Which arm ?" asked the man behind him.

"The right arm ! Oh, you're hurting it ! You're hurting all the fingers !"

"Oh, shut up ! You ain't got no arm !"

## THE MAN IN THE FIRING LINE.

*Balkan War 1912-13.*

THE general-in-chief dwells in his special railway train ; the corps commanders dash to and fro in their automobiles ; the divisional generals, the brigadiers, the colonels ride as become their rank. They are dignitaries, but their brows are lined with care ; and the object of their care is the humble foot-soldier, who is tramping, in his hundreds of thousands, hour after weary hour,



through the desolate passes of the Rhodope mountains, and over the soft roads of the Thracian plains. Anatolian peasant, Bulgar farmer, porter, shoemaker, waiter at a café, a cipher in the unconsidered masses in the times of peace, he is suddenly of supreme importance. Considered individually, he is the principal in the mighty duel. His officers are but his seconds, whose great and everlasting preoccupation it is to get him into the field, to place him in a favourable position when there, to advise him where to aim, to replenish him with ammunition, to keep him fed and clothed at points far from the depots of supply. At this immense problem of "seconding" a million men, the best brains

of five nations are working at top pressure.

However brilliant the strategical conception of the commander-in-chief, however well-planned his intended marches across the map, however enthusiastic the co-operation of his lieutenants, all is valueless if the trudging infantryman does not arrive, or, having arrived, is fatigued, starved, panic-stricken, or out of ammunition. Ultimately, all centres upon him.

For him the aeroplanes rise like larks from the field in the mists of dawn. For him the cavalry ride far in front, and scan the landscape for an enemy that may take him unawares. For him the artillery swings into action, battery by battery, and

thunders at the distant hills, flinging its awful shells among the men that lie in wait for him, so that when he charges it is upon a foe whose nerves are shaken and his courage sapped. For him the roads behind his back are jammed for miles with wagons bearing his food, his ammunition, and the thousand and one articles necessary to maintain him strong and healthy in the field. For him the divisional staffs struggle with the problem of bringing an endless train of vehicles over bad roads, so that they shall arrive at the hour he wants them, and at the same time shall not hamper him in his march or impede the comrades hurrying to his help.

And what of him, the object of

all this solicitude? See him arriving at the regimental depots whither he has been summoned as a reservist from his farm or shop or factory, dull-witted tiller of the soil, or sharp, nervous denizen of the city. His rifle, pack, and uniform are issued to him, and he is marched into the parade-ground, where the exasperated officers curse at his clumsy efforts to remember the once familiar drill. A day or two and, headed by the band, which blares out a tune that should set his feet stepping smartly forward, the regiment marches through a cheering crowd to the railway station. The flames of enthusiasm around him fire his blood also; he crowds into the wagons, coal-truck, cattle-van, or passenger-

coach, and shouts and sings. Why, he does not exactly know, but he feels himself more comfortable if he makes a noise. He is not so liable to think of the little farm that awaits its winter ploughing ; the face of a woman may cease to haunt him.

The train rolls off upon a slow and frequently interrupted journey. He sings and shouts until utter boredom ensues. To get free from his crawling prison presents itself as the ideal of happiness. At wayside stations the monotony is broken—if the war is yet in its early stages—by enthusiastic patriots who press food and drink and tobacco upon him. They cheer, and he cheers too, until the train moves off again, and he relapses into ennui.



At last he arrives. With his comrades he tumbles out of the wagon, stiff with long hours of cramped confinement. The night is falling. The officers give sharp orders. The battalion forms itself into line, into column, and moves off. The march prolongs itself in twilight, and then in darkness through an unknown landscape. Where are they going? He does not know. He is very tired and, despite the offertories *en route*, hungry. At last comes the order to halt, and then to bivouac. They are in an open field. He looks round for some evidence of preparation. Where is the supply-train? It has not arrived. Supperless and weary, he flings himself on the bare ground and sleeps, his overcoat—if it has been

served out to him—his only protection against the chill mists of the night.

All too soon the reveillé wakes him. More hungry than before, he rises and stretches the stiffness from his limbs. A wagon rumbles into the field. Food? No—ammunition. His generals will feed him if they can, but they will supply him with cartridges, no matter what obstacles are in the way. He nibbles at the biscuit of the emergency ration, and finally devours it voraciously. The cartridges are served out to him with a lavish hand. Bandolier, pouch, pockets are filled with the weighty little clips, until his coat hangs heavy on him like a garment of lead.

The battalion ranges itself, marches off in column of fours. Whither?

Who knows ? Rumours fly along the ranks, pessimistic or madly cheerful. As the light grows stronger and they top a hill, they perceive another regiment marching ahead. They are brigaded, then. With whom ? Gradually, Heaven knows whence, the information spreads. Their circle of knowledge widens, until it embraces the division, the corps. There it stops. The army corps of which they are a part is like a world to them. Self-sufficient, it makes its way across an unknown universe, into which the enemy will flare like a comet.

At last, one morning, the soldier wakes to the roar of a persistent artillery. The great day has dawned. The brigade is formed up in parade

order, and a general comes and says nice, flattering, encouraging things to it. A glow wakes in each individual heart. Carts roll up to them, bringing provisions and more ammunition. The general is thinking of them, and they in return conceive a high regard for the general. God is great, and the general is his prophet! Presently they begin to march.

The whole world is filled with noise. Everything shakes with it. It presses uncomfortably upon the ears. The artillery is hammering at the distant perilous gates by which he is to pass.

Suddenly a shriek passes overhead like some screaming panic-stricken djinn. A dreadful crash follows.

Something clutches at his heart. The drums begin to roll, hypnotizing his mind away from the imminent danger. The brigadier rides past with his staff, smiling. All is well.

Evolutions follow, he almost unconscious of them. He finds himself in line. In front of him is a landscape, normal enough, with hills and woods and streams. From unseen origins great waves of appalling sound roll across it.

Two companies advance upon his right, opening their files swiftly into wide intervals. A long line of isolated men, they disappear into a declivity. Instantly a sharp crackling sound comes from the hollow. His heart jumps ; a queer sensation fills his chest. It has begun. He



sees his colonel in front, laughing with his captain. All is well.

He gazes at the landscape before him. Not a human being is visible, but the noise increases. The vast roar of the artillery oppresses him, induces a vague anxiety. Overhead the shriek passes again and again, a flight of djinns. The crackle in the hollow swells louder, splutters faster and faster. A shell bursts with a paralysing shock just in front of him. A couple of men in the line fall for no obvious reason, and lie still. He shifts nervously from foot to foot.

Suddenly his company moves forward. He cannot remember hearing the order which started it. He finds himself advancing, his comrades veer-

ing away from him. The company is extending in open order. An isolated figure, he descends the slope. A savage swarm of insects greets him, droning past his ears. A man near him pitches and rolls. The insects are bullets whizzing past ! He hesitates involuntarily, chilled with the instinctive fear of Death. The captain runs in front, waves his sword, and shouts. His gesticulations are violent, but his voice comes faint, attenuated, through the surge of noise. On, on !

An irritation succeeds to the first chill of fear in the soldier. These flying bullets annoy him. Those men who are shooting at him must be summarily dealt with. The captain is right. On !

Before him is a long line of individual busy figures. They run forward, fall, fire, and run on again. They are the two companies which preceded him. On their track are men who have failed to rise again—men who sit up and look stupidly at a blood-stain on their uniform. He passes these like figures in a dream. He is running now. The high-pitched drone about his ears becomes more intense, rises to a wail. A whistle shrills. He flings himself upon the ground and looks for his captain. The officer is pointing to a wood down in the valley. "Nine hundred yards!" The soldier understands intuitively rather than hears. He adjusts the sight, and fires at the wood. What a relief is

the action of pulling the trigger, the report of the exploding cartridge. His nerves, stressed to high tension, discharge suddenly. He fires again and again. The whistle shrills anew. The captain is on his feet—follow him !

On, on ! His emotions are a chaos of rage and fear. His impressions are a blurred vision of suddenly important folds of ground, of men that run, of men that fling up their arms and topple, a confused consciousness of rending, crashing sounds, of the imperatively shrieking whistle. He is in a turmoil where time and space are lost. His heart is working at high speed. His brain is congested with blood. He shouts and does not know it. Fires and feels

not the pressure of his finger on the trigger. He comes to a consciousness of himself only at intervals, as a driving mist breaks to reveal for a moment the serene, unchanging sky.

A stream flows before him unexpectedly. He plunges in up to his waist like some piece of mechanism wound up to go recklessly straight ahead. A multitude of impinging bullets lashes the water round him into foam. He presses on—a madman, blind to the meaning of an observed effect.

At the farther side he comes up with the survivors of the first two companies. They crouch under a high bank. From above comes a quick succession of vivid, splitting crashes. The first-comers shake their



heads—impossible to talk in this noise—and cower. He comes to himself suddenly, feels himself a thing of nought madly affronting an entity of colossal might. Go back? He turns his head and sees a swarm of his comrades pressing after him, splashing through the stream. The sight encourages him; the drift is still onward. On then? He looks for his captain. The officer has disappeared. A young lieutenant of his company is gesticulating, pointing to the bank.

Two or three men scale it, are silhouetted against the sky. They are flung back on the instant as by a wind—corpses. The little lieutenant blows shrilly on his whistle, a shriek of rage. He dashes at the

bank, mounts it, waves his sword. On, on! As one follows a supernatural being, with a vast unreasoning wave of confidence, he also springs up the bank—the others likewise. A consciousness of a swarm of men pressing at his back, sustaining him, drives him forward.

He runs, with all his faculties focussed on the lieutenant. At the whistle he flings himself down and fires at the wood, now close—once—twice—the third time there is no report. He feels quickly in his pockets for another clip of cartridges. There are none left. He has fired a couple of hundred times, and it seems scarcely a dozen. A wave of despair follows close on his stupefaction. He is helpless, weaponless.

Back then ? No. The other companies behind him are swarming on, yelling in strange voices that are heard only in faint gusts of sound. The whistle shrieks. The young lieutenant—miraculous creature—is on his feet, waves them forward. The bayonet then !

The bayonet ! Another impulse of confidence surges up in him. The long, thin strip of steel at the end of his rifle seems a part of himself, a projected nerve ; he experiences a physical need to plunge it into something soft, yielding. It seems to burn with the intensity of his desire. Before him a long line of fresh-turned earth comes into sight, just in front of the wood ; a haze lowers over it, and the glint of steel and

stabs of flame flicker in the haze. A few yards only separate him from it. He sees, with impuissant rage, figures spring up from the line of earth and run away. He howls in anger that they should thus escape his vengeance. Men fall fast on every side of him. He is blind to their fate, deaf to the wail of bullets and the crash of shells. Thought ceases in him. He is a maddened animal urged forward at its highest speed by the primeval lust to stab and slay.

At last ! A figure rises up before him as in a fog. He drives his bayonet into it instantly. Fiercely voluptuous, he feels the steel sink in. Around him is pandemonium.

After an incomputable time he

emerges from a nightmare of shouts and blows and screams. The long line of trench is occupied by his comrades. The young lieutenant is appointing a guard over a group of sullen prisoners. More men come up and cheer. He cheers also.

Men continue to arrive. The brigadier and his staff gallop up. The great man is pleased. He shouts something about heroes. The soldier thrills with gratification. He has fulfilled his destiny. The petty farmer, the salesman, the factory-hand has been shaped into a successful instrument of war. The long and anxious "seconding" of his officers is triumphantly rewarded. They talk grandiloquently about glory and heroism.



The soldier nurses this comfortable sensation of being heroic until the hostile guns search for and find him with angry, vicious shrapnel. Then he tries to remember it.

THE END.





Why should people write  
such silly rot & get away with  
it. I should like to know

